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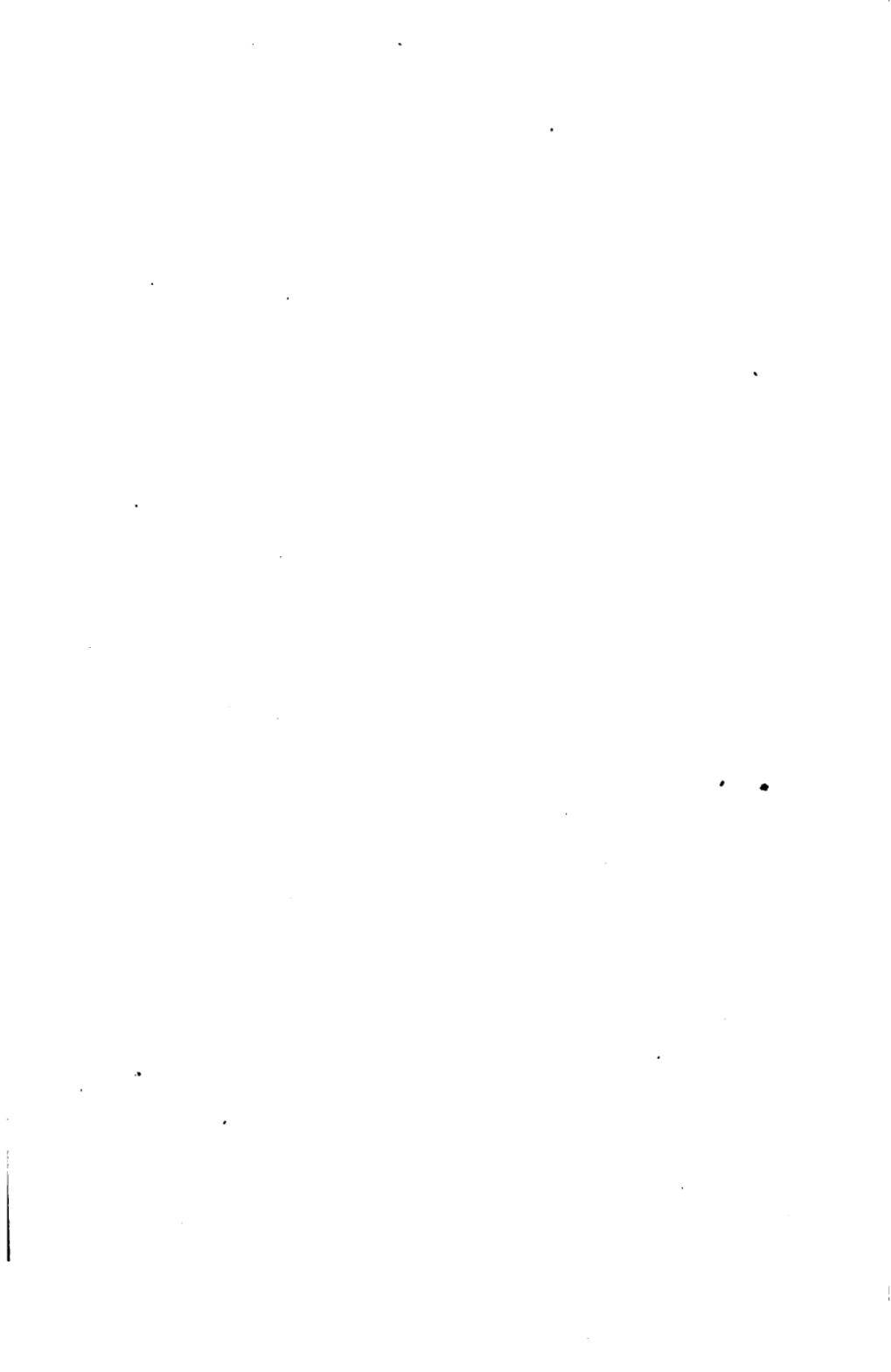
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THE
PITY OF IT

MRS M.E. SMITH





THE PITY OF IT.

VOL. II.

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THE PITY OF IT

BY

MRS. M. E. SMITH

AUTHOR OF

“IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN,” “TIT FOR TAT,”
ETC. ETC.

“O, Iago, the pity of it, Iago.”

IN THREE VOLUMES

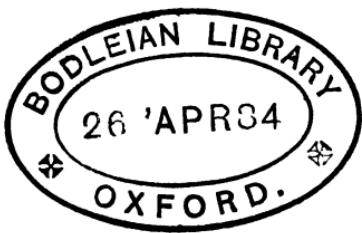
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THE PITY OF IT.

CHAPTER I.

The slander of some people is as great a recommendation as the praise of others.

FIELDING.

THE drive into Bulford had been disturbing, and Wiggles' face had a not unwonted shade of something not exactly care, but a sort of pitiful distress—a vicarious distress that had in it nothing of self. She leant back on the cushioned seat, letting her head incline to one side. The light hood of the dust-cloak had fallen partially off, and from under the closer hood of her conventional habit some bright golden locks had escaped; they lay on the rich mauve fabric of her habit, in the mellow rays of the October

sun, gleaming like strands of gold. She had closed her eyes, but her lips lay apart, just showing the pearly row of little teeth. Her hands were clasped together on her lap, on which lay the large cross, Mrs. Biles' particular aversion. The window was open from the top, and ever and again a light puff of wind lifted the shining locks just for a second, and, passing on, left them to flutter back airily to their resting-place. There was something soothing in the rapid, motionless motion of the swift train, and in the soft air playing on her face, for the troubled look passed away, and an expression of infinite repose took its place—not the repose of slumber, but the spirit's rest. But in a little while that, too, changed ; the pretty lips trembled into a smile, and the colour rose rich and soft to cheek and brow ; she returned to present life with a start, and with a set action, though unconsciously, looked direct at the far corner opposite to her seat.

An angry flush followed instantly. It was Herries Heron's eyes that had drawn hers by the occult force of will. Instantly, on meeting her look of recognition, he made as if to take a seat nearer her, but with a movement of quiet determination she put her small travelling-bag on the one opposite, which was vacant, and, slipping off her dust-cloak, placed it on the one next her. Herries understood the action. He bit his lip.

There was one other occupant of the carriage, Mrs. Friar, the Lady Bountiful of Perrypip, and comptroller-general of its charities. Mrs. Friar's regards had also been persistently, though furtively, bent on the seemingly sleeping Wiggles, but her skirts were closely drawn round her little person, in protest of contamination from the mysterious tenant of the Meadows Lodge.

To Mrs. Friar there was no doubt that this was a pre-arranged meeting; she drew herself up into a good survey position, and partially closed her eyes.

Wiggles, her little defence arrangements completed, then bowed gravely to the forward young man.

'I did not see you get in at Bulford,' she said.

With a profound, and, Wiggles felt, ironical return of her formal greeting, Herries placed himself in the next seat but one to his companion, and bending over the cloak, on which with almost a warning-off motion Wiggles' hand rested, he answered,

'I got in two stations beyond. I slept at Aston Hall,' naming a neighbouring country house, 'last night, and am returning to London for the day ; delighted to be your squire.'

'Thank you,' she said, demurely, 'but I never travel with impedimenta ; would you like the *Bulford Chronicle*?' she handed him a paper, which she had cut while he was speaking.

Mindful in a way of *les convenances*, he took the paper, and Wiggles, at the same moment opening her bag on the seat oppo-

site, took out a ball of soft red wool and a pair of knitting-needles, and began to knit.

Herries had heard of the wonderful nun's dress, but he had not seen it hitherto, so now he scrutinised its details with minute and particular attention. Wiggles felt that he was doing so.

'Have you lost something?' she asked at last.

'Yes.'

'Then I'm afraid you must get a search-warrant.'

'Why?'

'Because your missing property is evidently concealed about my person.'

'I am beginning to think it is.'

Wiggles dropped a stitch, and curled her lip.

'You don't ask me what it is,' he said, insinuatingly.

'If I have it, and you know what it is, there's nothing to ask,' and she dropped another stitch.

Herries saw that she had done so.

‘Well, will you give it me back?’

‘I cannot give what I never took.’

‘Or its equivalent?’

‘I can *sell*, but not barter,’ she said, her veiled eyes lighting up with mischief.

He looked distrustfully at her, but floundered on.

‘Then you acknowledge the theft?’

‘Of what?’ and she raised her eyelids, as if involuntarily, looked at him blankly, and arched her eyebrows disdainfully.

‘My heart.’

She let her knitting, needles and ball together, drop, put her little palms together with the action of one playing castanets, and rang out a peal of merry laughter, which yet had something irritating in its cadence.

Mrs. Friar looked scandalised; she let down the window, and fanned herself vigorously with her handkerchief. Wiggles stopped as suddenly as she had begun, gathered up her working gear which Herries

had ungallantly let lie where it had fallen, threw the wool over her hand, leant back with a saucy toss of her hooded head, and sang, with a subdued but clear soprano, mockingly,

‘ Little Bo-peep has lost her sheep,
And cannot tell where to find them ;
Leave them alone, and they’ll come home,
And bring their tails behind them.’

Nettled at the utter failure of his attempt at flirtation, but conscious that by showing his chagrin he would give his enemy an advantage, Herries laughed as in good part.

‘ Brooks hadn’t far to look,’ he said, not a little viciously.

‘ Wise men,’ she answered, composedly, ‘ seldom go on a bootless bene.’

‘ A what?’

‘ A bootless errand.’

He was at fault, so changed the subject.

‘ What order do you belong to?’ he asked.

‘ St. Incognita, and, oh! I forgot, we’re vowed to silence for an hour each day as the clock strikes twelve.’

She took out her watch, and held its face to Herries. It wanted but five minutes to the hour named.

'Five minutes' grace,' he said, and then added, 'Do they call you Sister Wiggles?'

Against her will she laughed.

'No, Sister Claire.'

'That's my sister's name; how funny.'

'My name is Margaret.'

'Felix always calls you Wiggles.'

'Felix is not romantic.'

'What may I call you?'

'Miss Dewar.'

'I think you have a fancy for a plurality of names. I should like to add to your stock. Don't you think Herries pretty?'

'Yes, by itself. But time's up,' and she once more held up the admonitory watch.

'You'll find a good deal of reading in the *Bulford Chronicle*; there's a full report of the dinner at the "Cross-Keys" to the Society of Good Fellows—I didn't see

your name mentioned;—a long account of a penny-reading at the new Methodist conventicle; a few columns of agricultural intelligence; some letters about some municipal disagreements, and a long poem in blank verse on the Earth. You won't miss conversation,' and she resolutely set her face in silence.

Herries yawned, sulkily opened the *Bulford Chronicle*, yawned wider, looked out of the window at Wiggles' side without daring to appropriate the vacant seat guarded by her bag, folded up the paper mechanically, cast furtive glances at her demure face bending over her knitting, twisted himself round impatiently to the opposite window, and brought up his regards full front in Mrs. Friar's inquisitive eyes. Mrs. Friar, who was preternaturally quick at hearing, had caught the sense, or rather the drift of the smart dialogue that had passed between the mysterious Wiggles and the young man, whom she knew to be the Hon. Herries

Heron, now on a visit at Cartmel. What she had heard had convinced her that the meeting between the young people was accidental in part, but she suspected in her small, tortuous mind, that the gentleman had probably known of his companion's intended journey, and had managed to accompany her. Mrs. Friar was one of those deductive persons who are slow to believe that anything ever happens without premeditation. She herself was always full of little plans, foresights, surprises, and adaptations, never without a plausible reason or excuse, and had withal a genius for making capital out of even untoward circumstances. Never did Mrs. Friar allow a chance to escape her. The good lady had been much exercised by the mysterious tenants of the Lodge, and Wiggles, in some of her quiet ministrations in the village, had learnt the cleverly concocted story she had pieced together from current surmises and floating bits of gossip.

To give Mrs. Friar her due, the narrative was strictly circumstantial—it was ingenious, and at one or two telling points it was supported by credible evidence. As told by her, it took impetus from her clever telegraphy of insinuation, ‘nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles.’ In substance it was as follows:

The Lodge was a Cartmel institution, and Mrs. Gilchrist a pensioner—for *good* reasons—on the squire. Who the young lady was, needed no telling; she was certainly Mrs. Gilchrist’s daughter, and a bold thing she was; let Mr. Brooks countenance her as he might, *their* intimacy was no secret. He rode past the Lodge once every day, if not twice, and it was to be supposed he did not do that for nothing; but Mr. Brooks was the squire’s conscience—he could make him believe black was white. It was all very well for dear, innocent, old Dr. Norris to vouch for the respectability of these intruders in Perrypip; he believed what he

chose, and Perrypip living was in the squire's gift. It stood to reason that there was something queer at the bottom of it all, for the *young squire had never once been a bit in love with the girl*, and, if he had not been warned who she was, he was safe to have lost his heart—he was so soft with pretty girls; and it was well known that Lady Calderman had come to Cartmel to take care of her son, who was rather wild, people said.

There would be a great scandal some day, and it behoved respectable and responsible people to be careful, so as not to be compromised. For her part, she had point-blank told Dr. Norris she would not call—she had daughters, and she had a son. She had, also, a duty to her own position; she mixed with county people—indeed, Mr. Friar's acreage entitled her to a county status—and county people were exclusive. The Elmores altogether had lost position. Mrs. Elmore's disappearance had never been

accounted for ; she was a proud woman, and it was more than likely that Mrs. Gilchrist could tell a good deal—at any rate, there was little doubt that the squire knew only too well who Mrs. Biles' tenants were. And Mrs. Biles of the Meadows Farm, too, had a story ; she was separated from her husband—it did not matter whose the fault, people had nothing to do with the rights and wrongs of matrimonial quarrels, all they had to do was to mark their disapproval of separations ; a woman living apart from her husband, no matter what her position, was always under a cloud. Mrs. Biles, too, was very independent, very free of speech. She, Mrs. Friar, had once asked her a simple question about Mrs. Elmore, not from curiosity, but mere neighbourly interest, and the reply had been that when the family were not at Cartmel she never heard anything about them.

Altogether, it was very hard on Perry-pip to be invaded by such questionable per-

sons. She had done her best to set an example of high-minded exclusiveness and Christian vigilance, and she only wished that the vicar knew a little more of the world—it did not do in these demoralising days to be as harmless as a dove, unless you were as wise as a serpent, and anybody could take in dear old Dr. Norris.

Herries brought his wandering regards to a sudden point, that point being Mrs. Friar's keen, little, round, sparkling eyes. He had not the least notion who she was. 'A native,' he supposed ; and then he took out his betting-book, and began to make calculations.

'Would you like the window up?' asked Mrs. Friar, smiling benignly.

'Thank you, no,' he replied, 'unless Miss Dewar objects,' and he looked in the young lady's direction, ready to take advantage of any possible overture.

Wiggles did not raise her head.

Mrs. Friar looked virtuously severe.

'I think,' she said, lighting up her smile

which had gone out, ‘I think I heard you say you were staying at Aston Hall. I have the pleasure of Lady Carman’s acquaintance. We had invitations for their cricket ball last month, but one of my daughters was ill, so we could not go. Were you there?’

‘No, I was not in the neighbourhood at the time. Heron tells me it was good fun ; a regular yokel gathering.’

Mrs. Friar’s smile went out again.

‘Lady Carman is most exclusive,’ she said, assertively ; ‘but in one’s own county one cannot draw too hard a line.’

‘Ah, Sir Thomas is bidding for the county, I believe. I told Felix he ought to have a shy at it too. Do you know Elmore?’

‘No,’ and Mrs. Friar jerked up her little red chin. ‘Mr. Friar used to know the old squire, but’—and her voice sank to a confidential whisper—‘I have daughters, and one can’t be too particular in one’s own

county. The entertainment I speak of was no electioneering affair; but, whatever Sir Thomas's intentions may be, Mr. Felix Elmore, or indeed any Elmore would have no chance.'

Now the Elmore story, as it has been set forth in these pages, was only known in part to Herries Heron. Like most young men of the world—whose predilections lie, not in the boudoir or the ball-room, but in the outer circle of the hunting-field and race-course—he took little heed of social gossip; a bit of scandal had to be very well spiced to rouse even his partial interest. Felix Elmore was a right good fellow all round, just the sort he liked, did not muddle his brain with books or politics, kept them clear for better things, dogs and horses; he was a crack shot, a first-rate oarsman, splendid rider, and no better boxer—only wanted to be out of leading-strings to be a go-ahead topper. As to the row between his parents, that was an old story, and nobody seemed

to know much about it. She had been jealous—all women were—rather liked a jealous woman—still champagne was bosh—she had fizzed like a Halloween nut and exploded, and there was an end to it as far as the world was concerned. Few women were as sensible as his own mother, who had accepted the inevitable with a good grace—*esclandres* were bad form.

Mrs. Friar's significant words and tone had roused these discursive thoughts, which hitherto had been mere idle, mental observations, and had sent them a flying squadron, swift as electric words, through Herries' brain, when there occurred a block, a block caused by one reflection, which, taking the form of a suggestion, refused to 'move on,' and that was: Felix had, on the rare, and these casual, occasions, when he had alluded to his mother, spoken of her in the past tense; therefore he must have been told that she was dead, which, as far as he had heard, was not the case.

There must, then, be some very strong motive on the part of the squire to induce him to keep his son in ignorance of his mother's existence. A sudden desire to hear the connected story seized him, and discerning in Mrs. Friar the requisite material,—gossiping proclivities and local knowledge—he determined to 'draw' her, as he mentally termed it, and this he did deftly; for, though not gifted with much social tact, he was with cunning, and at no time did he entertain moral scruples of a delicate nature. He said,

'Ah, Felix has no tastes for politics, and, as for ambition, it requires a man with brains to have that, and Felix is far too sensible to be clever. It's only short-sighted fools who make statesmen or legislators, they're everybody's property but their own, and as for what they get in a £. s. d. sense, it's never worth the candle. But, if he chooses to go-in for the county, why shouldn't he have as good a chance as anyone?

The Elmores for generations represented —shire.'

'It was reserved for the last generation then, or the last but one rather, to bring disrepute on the family; the —shire people are very high-toned. Feudal days are past for ever, and I am sure they would return no one to Parliament who had a cloud on his name.'

As Mrs. Friar, in a carefully-pitched undertone, delivered herself of this sentence, she cast a meaning but furtive glance at Wiggles, who, her knitting in her lap, had lapsed in consciousness to dreamland where, now at her mother's side, anon hand-in-hand by the Meadows' hedgerows in the still starlight, she wandered with the newly-found embodiment of that existence which made hers dual; of which state of beatitude Mrs. Friar's exact rendering was—

'She's asleep.'

But the little lady did not raise her voice; if at first she feared her words reaching

Wiggles' ear, now she feared their awaking her.

'A cloud,' repeated Herries, his curiosity whetted as much by the lady's invidious glance at Wiggles as by her words. Insensibly he connected the latter with the mystery hinted at, looked at her for a passing second, saw she was oblivious of all but her own thoughts, and continued, assuming an air of indifference as if he conversed merely to pass the time. 'A cloud! ah, you allude to the squire's mother. I remember hearing she was greatly disliked, but that is such an old story, and not her son's fault at all.'

'No, not the squire's mother, but his wife.' Mrs. Friar's voice sank lower.

'She died, didn't she?' asked Herries, innocently.

'Poor thing! it is to be hoped she did, and I daresay the squire would like to make people think she did; but her death was never put into the papers, and I, for one,

don't believe she did. She was a proud woman, I have always heard, and it is believed she had good cause for jealousy. They do say the squire had too. It was an ugly story altogether ; in any case she left her home, she took one child, he the other—a mutual arrangement, *I believe*—and she was never heard of again.

'There was some talk about Mr. Franklin and her, and there was no doubt that he was an old lover ; *he* has never married, however. It is very strange he, the squire, should come back after all these years, just when these mysterious strangers had made their appearance at the Lodge. That he knows who they are there can be no doubt, and, if all was told that could be told, perhaps Mrs. Gilchrist, as she calls herself, could say better than anyone *why* Mrs. Elmore left her house. Mr. Brooks evidently knows who they are. The girl is certainly an adventuress.'

'Who do you think they *are* ?'

Herries' interest was now thoroughly roused; he scarcely disguised his desire to know more.

'Oh, how can I tell,' she replied, cooling down as her listener warmed. 'I can only surmise, and then it is never safe to speak out. However, this much I may say—*take care*. You are a friend, it would appear, of young Mr. Elmore. You may be thrown into his way—be guarded. I have a son myself, so I know what young men are.'

He laughed encouragingly.

'Oh, I'm not half so susceptible as my friend Felix, and he hasn't fallen a victim yet.'

'*Nor ever will*,' she said, hastily. 'You ask Mr. Brooks why.'

Mrs. Friar, a little off her guard as her subject increased in interest, had raised her voice at the last words, and the name she mentioned reached Wiggles' ears—*only* the name, nothing more. Had it been whispered even, it would have done the same,

perhaps, for at that moment to Margaret Elmore he who owned it was a living presence.

She turned quickly.

Mrs. Friar caught, with a side glance, the hasty motion of her head ; she saw she had been heard, and by a rapid telegraphy of contracted eyebrow, a quiver more than a warning shake of the head, and a stifled cough, she managed to make Herries understand that the third occupant of the carriage had awoke.

As quick as his informant, Herries took in what it was intended he should take in, and he came to the rescue.

'I won't forget,' he said, with formal courtesy ; 'if the horse is for sale, you shall hear.'

Wiggles did not take up the golden thread of her day-dream ; she resumed her knitting, but the expression of her face was, not encouraging, and Herries opined that the hour of silence would be kept to the last moment ; and so it was.

It wanted just five minutes to its completion when the train reached Paddington Station. Herries officiously offered to see after ‘the luggage’; but, again holding up her watch, Wiggles managed to make him thoroughly understand that her tongue was still tied, and that she had nothing with her but the dust-cloak and small bag in her hand. He saw that further pursuit was useless; but he could not conceal his chagrin. His curiosity and something more was now strongly aroused.

Standing on the platform, in the mellow October light, her arch face only partially shrouded by the jealous wimple from which a golden lock had escaped, and now lay gleaming on the vivid mauve of her eccentric habit, she seemed to him a provoking and tantalising vision of a creature beyond the proper element of such love as he had to give, and yet by the circumstances which surrounded her, within the scope of his will and wish, and, young as Herries Heron was

in years, he was no neophyte in libertinism. He suddenly determined to follow her to her destination, and by fair means or foul to find out the story of her life, a story she was evidently at pains to conceal. To Herries, of women outside his own domestic circle, there were but two classes, fools and rogues, otherwise, wheat and tares; what the world recognised as worth was to Herries Heron sober folly, in some cases a mere mask, in others a puerile delusion. Neither pride of birth nor consciousness of status deterred him in his pursuit of what he deemed pleasure; but, when in his assigned position in society, he could show that he was possessed of both to a degree of almost arrogance.

‘Good-bye,’ said Mrs. Friar, whom Herries had left to shift for herself. ‘Good-bye—Mr. Heron, is it not?’

‘Yes,’ Herries replied, a little stiffly, raising his hat in adieu.

‘I knew you by your likeness to your

father,' she added. 'Lord Calderman has often lunched at Friarsland, when the meet was in the neighbourhood. If you are in —shire this winter we shall be glad to see you. I think you bought a horse from Mr. Friar the other day.'

Herries called to mind that the pretentious little lady might prove useful in the quest he meant to follow, so he smiled, and said he was charmed with his bargain, and would certainly ride it to its old quarters some day.

He then turned hastily round in search of Wiggles; but she had disappeared. Anathematising Mrs. Friar beneath his teeth, in no measured manner, he hailed a cab; but, just as he was swinging himself in, he caught a glimpse of a certain mauve garment through the partially open door of a brougham, so held by a page, to whom some one inside was giving orders. The brougham was small and elegant, guiltless of armorial bearings, but with, instead, a single gold letter, 'C.' The coachman, the

page, the horse—in fact, the whole turn-out was in faultless though severely plain style. All this Herries' practised eye took in at a glance.

'Follow that brougham,' he said to the cabman, speaking through the aperture in the roof of the cab.

'All right,' replied the man, with a grin.

In less than twenty minutes the driver lifted the communicating lid, and informed his fare that the 'trap had pulled up.'

'Stop, too, behind,' cried Herries.

The man seemed familiar with the process of this species of running to earth, and obeyed, drawing his vehicle to the side of the street, out of the track of the busy traffic.

'Don't let them see you,' called out Herries, rather inconsiderately.

'Best look for a stone,' said the man, with a broader grin, at the same time jumping down and elevating his horse's near foreleg.

Unsuspected and unnoticed, Herries took

his observations, which in substance were : No. 2, Waterpark Road, South Kensington, a moderate-sized house, standing back from the road, surrounded by apparently one acre of garden ground, and facing the Park.

' Go on,' he cried, and the driver, remounting his seat, went slowly past the inspected dwelling. The heavy oak gateway, through which the brougham had just passed, was still standing wide open, and Herries saw the object of his quest—the tantalizing Wiggles—run lightly up the broad flight of stone stairs ; then the hall door opened, and a lady of a noble presence came hastily forward ; another second, and the concealing hood was thrown back, the imperfectly confined golden hair escaping in dazzling profusion, her arms were round the lady's neck, and happy kisses were interchanged.

' Mrs. Gilchrist,' said Herries to himself, ' and in her true character—a lady.'

The next moment the page swung back the heavy gate, and Herries saw no more.

CHAPTER II.

‘My life has crept so long on a broken wing.’

‘I DID not come to meet you, Maggie darling,’ said Mrs. Gilchrist, as she entered a bright morning-room, holding her daughter’s hand; ‘I thought there might be a risk of some one from Cartinel seeing me. I have had one terrible scare already.’

‘I am so glad you did not,’ replied Wiggles, ‘for that extremely obtrusive and irrepressible youth, Mr. Heron, was in the carriage with me, and Mrs. Friar, too, and greatly scandalised at her company she looked. Lady Calderman has not told her who I am.’

‘It is about her I want to talk to you,’ said Mrs. Gilchrist; ‘somehow I felt nervous writing on the subject.’

'I knew it, mother, so I took your hint and came; but I must take a look round first, and have a peep at the garden,' and throwing off the hood and shrouding cape, retaining only the wimple, from which her hair was struggling free, Wiggles flitted through the open window, which was to the ground, and made a tour of inspection in the garden, which showed evidence of mindful care and tasteful culture. A large conservatory abutted from the drawing-room, out of which the morning-room opened, and on the opposite side, built against the high wall, was a still larger greenhouse, which was also a viney. The garden itself was a labyrinth of beds, a gay parterre which from the first season of bloom to the advent of frost was one changing rainbow of colour. The gardener was busy lifting tender plants into shelter, for October was waning into November, and the nights were sharp. A frame was open for winter storage, and already half-full of cuttings for spring

growths, and here and there tiny heaps of autumn leaves told their own story of vanished verdure.

The man stopped in his operations to greet his young mistress with English stolidity, but evident pleasure.

'However have you got on without me, Torrens?' asked Wiggles. 'I wish I could stop the day; a good hour's potting would do me all the good in the world.'

'An' the plants, too, miss,' was the grave answer; 'seems to me they ain't flourished so well since you've bin away. They're meaning things is plants; they feels a lot more nor folks thinks. Seen some foine-like gardens in the country, I s'pose, miss?' and Torrens looked at Wiggles inquiringly.

'Yes, but I like my own best. A strange garden to me is like strange company. I can't make friends with its flowers. I can't talk to them as I do to my own; the roses are too proud to grow on their own trees, and the lilies are so high and mighty

they keep all to themselves—wouldn't be seen among fuschias and azaleas ; nor the tulips either—vulgar things they are ; ranunculi, too, and the upstart wallflower—they've all little cliques of their own, and look down on the pretty, soft primulas and heliotrope, and on the violet, too—rank jealousy, I say,' and Wiggles nodded her wimpled head, and laughed.

'I don't go, neither,' said Torrens, leaning on his hoe, and speaking in a confidential tone as to one who would understand him, 'I don't go, neither, with all that sort o' order an' regulation 'mong flowers—makes 'em artificial-like, I says. My old mate, Jones, as 'prentised with me at Kew, he's second hand in Regent's Park now ; he's all for shows of colour—don't go in for mixing in beds no ways ; but I telled him one Monday—'twas Bank Holiday, and the parks was a sight—as he'd never know nothing of the real natur of flowers till he growed 'em together promiscuous-like, as

one set off another, the quiet colour keepin' down the flaring ones, an' the sweet-smellin' ones makin' up for them as had none. Same way as among mortals, miss. God Almighty mixes families extraordinary, in innerd 'sposition as well as upside looks.'

'Just as with music, Torrens; it's the blending of the different notes that makes each separate one speak to the heart.'

'Yes, miss, just so; I understand.' Torrens spoke as if gratified by Wiggles' appeal, as it were, to his intelligence. 'An' bees knows it too. It's a teaching, so it is, to watch 'em feedin'; they likes variety; they knows they couldn't fill their bags out o' one kind o' flower, so they drinks deep at one, an' sips at another, quite contented and lazy; but see 'em at one o' yer grand beds all o' one sort, it's very well at the first, an' the second dip, too, maybe, but when at the third offer they finds the blooms is all alike, they boom out their buzzes in a rage, an' dash away in a tantrum. I've

had my eye near knocked in by an angry bee. An' that minds me,'—Torrens laid down his hoe, and led the way to the south wall of the garden,—‘the hive as Mrs. Gilchrist bought in the spring 'as swarmed three times, an' we saved 'em all. There'll be a rare lot of virgin comb ready.’

The sun was shining brightly if not warmly, and along the row of hives the bees were flying in and out, in busy idleness. Wiggles went up to them fearlessly, holding out her ungloved hand, on which some alighted, as if expectant of nectar, ran swiftly across and flew harmlessly away. Round and round her fresh, smiling face they described gyrations, now clinging to a stray tress, taking it for a sunbeam, now basking beneath the warmth and light of her dazzling eyes, and all joining in murmuring chorus of loving welcome as they at last rose up like a hovering coronal above her head and dispersed.

‘They know me, Torrens,’ cried Wiggles,

with pride, 'my little garden's full of friends.'

'It's smell as bees knows,' said Torrens, unpoetically, 'they carries their heart in their noses,' and he grinned facetiously as he stepped aside to take a spade which had been left sticking in a newly-dug piece of bordering; as he did so he brought to the surface a large worm. It lay on the mould and writhed; quick as lightning a robin, which, unobserved by Wiggles, had followed her round the garden, flitting from tree to shrub, watching her with keen restlessness, now darted down on the luscious quarry, and demolished it in a masterly manner.

Wiggles stood close to the border and watched the process of absorption, then she knelt down, placed another small worm in her palm and held it out to the bird, which had not moved an inch. One moment only of hesitation, and, with tail in the perpendicular, wings slightly let down, and ruddy breast puffed out, Bob had perched on her wrist and appropriated the offering.

'Does he carry his heart in his nose, too, Torrens?' she asked, slyly, looking up into the rugged face of the old gardener.

'Noa, miss, but in his belly,' he answered, drily. 'Robins bees the greediest things in natur' an' the cruellest; that there one—ah, he knows as it's the fowls dinner-time, so he's off,' the bird had made a sudden flight across the wall; 'that un killed his mate no later nor this very week; she wouldn't find for herself, was allus a-follerin' of him, an' one day she got hold of a big worm he'd found, and had swallowed it afore he could get a bit, so with that he sets on her and kills her right off; an', miss, would you believe it, when he'd done it, up he flies on that there pear-tree and sings as loud as a nightingale.'

'Poor Mrs. Robin,' laughed Wiggles; 'a victim of misplaced affection. Ah, Torrens, there are a good many cock-robins among men.'

'Fear there are,' said Torrens, with a sigh;

'arter all, there's nothin' in the world as innocent as flowers ; pity as we don't take more schoolin' on 'em.'

There was then the greenhouse and the conservatory to visit ; the latter brought Wiggles back to the house. They were to dine at two.

It was not far from that hour now. But Wiggles had other visitations to make. She had to peep into the kitchen and hear about some family tribulations of the cook, a faithful servant of nearly ten years ; to ask the housemaid about her engagement, a mutable arrangement of uncertain standing ; and to give directions concerning sundry articles of apparel to her maid, who was also the family housekeeper.

When these various amenities were accomplished, she returned to her mother, and the pair dined together, chatting pleasantly as if no shadow hung over their house, or any sorrow, more than the common lot, had crossed their path.

But when the simple meal was over, and they were alone, a sudden silence fell on both. Neither seemed willing to begin the subject that had brought them together in the house they had left only a few weeks since on their apparently gipsying expedition. It was at last Wiggles who broke the ice; she said, abruptly,

'I wish they would all go away from Cartmel; if they don't, I'll leave the Lodge and come home till the coast is clear.'

'Maggie dear,' Mrs. Elmore spoke in a low voice, but clearly and determinedly, 'I think you must accept Lady Calderman's invitation.'

'Mother!'

'I have thought it well over, darling—and I wish it.'

'You wish it,'—Wiggles' eyes flashed—'you wish me to leave you. I don't believe you do. It is unnatural. You are not yourself, you don't know what it means—to leave you; I, to go away from you, to

take the name you have dropped, to call myself his daughter, to claim a place in the world when you have none. Mother, do you know what you are saying? You are not yourself, dear. I must come back to you till they all go away, you can't think right when I'm not with you ; do you know what you said, dear? that you *wished* me to leave you.'

Wiggles had left her chair, and was now kneeling at her mother's knee, looking up into her face with a strange wonder in her eyes, and speaking with a quivering lip.

But Claire Elmore looked down on the sweet face with a resolute expression that seemed to harden her features. She was very strong to bear, but in the task she had to perform she feared her heart. Never had her heart been so full of yearning tenderness for her loving, beautiful child, never had she realised more keenly the intense sympathy that entwined their beings in one, as now when she willed to send that

child from her, and not only to bid her go but to lay on her a burden that would, she knew, try her brave spirit to the uttermost. Therefore she set her face to show no relenting; she took the agitated girl's hands in her own, not caressingly, but firmly.

'Maggie darling,' she said. 'I know I am putting your faith in me to a cruel test, I know I am wounding your loving heart, but I only ask you to trust me. I will not even speak of what this resolution I have made costs me. I know how to bear in silence anything and everything for the sake of one I love, as, child, I love you. You are the purest love my heart has known, for there is no particle of self in it, and in that other kind of love, that love which is perhaps more vital because of its oneness, and the impossibility of its partition to others, self reigns supreme. It is in the nature of that love that self should reign supreme, for it is the sins against self that,

if they cannot destroy, yet deaden the quickening principle. Maggie, I long with a great longing for the time, which will surely come, when I may fill up to you all the blanks in my sad story ; now I ask your help. I ask you for unquestioning obedience. You do not believe that I wish to part with you, do you ?'

Claire read the girl's answer in her now streaming eyes.

'Then you will go ?' she whispered, as she bent and took the eloquent face between her hands and read its lineaments.

'Yes.'

That was all the answer given—it was scarcely audible. Then there was silence, broken only by a quick sob, repressed at its very utterance, for the girl had sought her mother's bosom, and lay weeping quietly there.'

Claire Elmore shed no tear, well for her could she have done so, but the source of her tears had dried up in that day of fierce heat so long ago.

In a little Wiggles grew calmer. She dried her eyes, and settled herself on a stool at her mother's feet. Then she looked up in Claire's face with a sorry attempt at a smile, and said, in a half-whisper,

'Dear, I'm just feeling what Isaac must have felt when his arms were bound before the altar and the wood, and he *didn't know why*.'

'But he did afterwards, Maggie ; he trusted his father.

'No, mother, to be practical, a substitute was given.'

Claire, for answer, shook her head, smoothing, as she did so, the soft, feathery flakes of sunny hair which had fluttered down over the girl's brow.

Then Wiggles, as if seizing a forlorn hope, added quickly,

'But Herries Heron is horrid, mother, and he thinks me fair game for his rude attentions.'

'That is because of your false position,

Maggie, and my keenest pain of late has been your false position, but I was helpless; now it seems as if the good God had taken pity on your innocence.'

'And yours, too, mother.'

'Oh, yes, perhaps, and mine, too,' she answered, drearily, 'and opened up this way for your deliverance. It is your father's will, you see, child, that you should assume your proper name, and take your proper place in society; when Mr. Heron knows who you are, he will soon alter his tone, and in any case you will have a leal supporter in Lady Calderman. Poor Margaret! she has suffered. There is not another woman in the world I would trust you to but her. You will have some difficulties to contend with, I know. General Horseman tells me that she loves her son dearly, and that he is very worthless. Lord Calderman, too, is a callous *roué*; but his wife has kept an honoured place in the world, and is as much respected as he is despised; at least,

by all right-minded persons. You will be safe under her roof.'

'And then,' said Wiggles, taking heart, and speaking more cheerily, 'and then I can see you almost daily; we won't really be separated.'

'No, Maggie. I have thought over that part of it, too. I must run no risk. If Lady Calderman once saw me, she would recognise me. I must shut up our home, dear, for a time at any rate, and go away somewhere, perhaps abroad, somewhere where I can hear from you every day, and be safe.'

Wiggles looked up almost fiercely, the tears again welling over, but she spoke with repression, clutching her mother's hands as if she were in danger of falling.

'It is cruel. I will die first,' and then, the meaning of her almost random words raising exaggerated fancies in her heated brain, her self-control gave way; she burst into a perfect agony of weeping, crying in-

coherently. ‘And I’d better die. I’m in the way ; my father repudiates and hates me, and my mother—casts—me—off.’

Claire let her weep ; she knew the power of tears. She sat motionless and silent.

After a little time the girl’s passionate burst had exhausted itself, and a little shamed, the tears still streaming, she drooped her head.

‘ You would not make my burden heavier, Maggie ?’ whispered her mother, gently.

‘ If you would only trust me fully,’ was the sobbing answer. ‘ I—I—feel as if you were—sacrificing me in the dark.’

‘ And I, Maggie ? Am I not sacrificing myself, too ?’

‘ Mother,’ was the almost inaudible reply, ‘you know the reason, and that sustains you. I—I—know nothing.’

‘ Yours, then, is the nobler sacrifice, child ; the Graeme motto is “*Foy est tout.*”’

‘ Will any good come of it ?’ was the still rebellious pleading.

'Surely, yes. Good always comes of what is right.'

'Oh, mother, mother, such cold morality cannot satisfy my heart. I could not live the year through without the sound of your voice and the touch of your hand ; and you, how will you live alone ? Ah, I know you better than you know yourself, it will kill you, and then my sacrifice will be in vain.'

But there was no sign of relenting in Claire Elmore's face. What her resolve cost her only she knew, but the very pain she suffered gave her strength to bear ; she would not even open her heart to pity, or rather discover the pity she felt ; she knew the strength of her child's nature, and she felt that she could only carry the decision she had come to by a firmness that would show no relenting. And now as she spoke, gentle and loving as were her words and tender their tone, Wiggles knew she had rebelled in vain. She said,

'Maggie, you know that for eighteen

years I have borne a great injustice and cruel separation. One little word of mine, and not a breath would ever have sullied my fair fame ; but I did not speak it. I never will speak it, because, child, I loved my husband. I love him still, and that word would have cost a life. Am I not then strong to bear ? Can I not bear, for only a little while, separation from you ? Felix, too, is my child, my first-born. I never sought to look on his face all these weary years, but I loved him as I loved you. Am I not then strong to bear ? I am not asking an idle sacrifice of you. Do you not see, by your father's acknowledging even tacitly your right to his name, that he makes me, in part, some reparation. People will say, "Ah, he knows now that he was jealous without a cause," and evil tongues will be silenced.'

Wiggles, subdued, was still unsatisfied.
She said,

'I will obey you, mother, even if my

heart should break, and, oh, I do hope I shan't hate Lady Calderman. She had no right to come between us. She has lost her own ewe lamb, and has taken yours. And I know I hate my father. First you sacrifice yourself to him, then Felix, and now me. Oh, mother, mother, you love him better than all the world ; you love him better than *us*. Such love is idolatry, it is wicked,' and again a burst of passionate tears relieved the over-wrought brain.

'Maggie,' was the gentle whisper, 'you will understand some day; and, oh, child, when your heart wakens to such love as I gave to Felix Elmore, you will judge me truer.'

With a sudden impulse, Wiggles changed her position and knelt at her mother's feet; she threw back her hair, which had floated forward, and then clasped her hands and bent her face over them.

'Mother,' she whispered, 'I did not think to tell you yet awhile. I must now.

Ralph Brooks loves me, and I love him. Oh, yes, my heart has awakened to love. I would die for him, but'—and she threw her head proudly back—‘but I told him I would hear no words of love from him, *none*, that I would give him no promise, that I would shut him out of my heart until to all the world my mother's name had been cleared of the foul stain my father had put on it. That is the quality of my love—and, mother, I would die for him.’

Mrs. Elmore had sunk back in her chair, her hand to her heart, pale as death.

‘And you hid this from me,’ she said faintly.

‘Because I did not wish you to think I was in any sorrow for your sake.’

Wiggles spoke in repentant accents, but she made no motion to approach her mother ; she looked a little afraid.

‘And what was his answer ?’

‘That he would help me to clear your name, that he believed in your innocence.’

‘Does he, I thank him ; a good man’s

opinion is to be valued,'—her tone was bitter—'does he believe me living or dead ?'

'I do not know. I asked no questions. You know I promised you I would not.'

'And you love him ?'

'Yes,' and Wiggles checked a rising sob.

Claire rose to her feet, very pale, very still, her hand on her heart; with the same controlling action, she spoke calmly, but there was a *timbre* of pain in her voice she could not repress. She said,

'Listen, Maggie. I do not blame you. Why should I ? It is natural—it is right. But, ah, me ! this has all come of the miserable deception of my life ; it would have been better had I told you all, as once I had determined ; and then I dared not—now I *cannot*. And more, I lay on you my command that you stir not a finger, that you speak not a word, that neither directly nor indirectly do you strive to clear my name to the world. Follow the impulses of your heart, child. Wed Ralph Brooks.

You have my full, free permission. You will be safe, and I shall die content.'

Unwittingly Mrs. Elmore spoke coldly; the great surprise of her daughter's confession had in a measure stunned her; her emotions, affection, love, fear, were mingled in confusion; feeling for the moment was dumb. There was anarchy, too, in Wiggles' breast. Two loves, the new and the old, rebellion against seeming injustice, dread that she had incurred displeasure, all warring together; she looked appealingly in her mother's face—it was averted; then she spoke, hardly knowing what she said—certainly not weighing her words—broad-cast she threw them, clasping and unclasping her little hands with a pressure that marked them in quick transition pink and white.

'No, I will not wed Ralph Brooks until all the world knows, and my father knows, that I have a right to the name I bear.'

The blood rushed over Claire's neck, up her marble face, to her very brow.

'Did you tell him so?' she asked, speaking slowly, and with a terrible repression.

'No,' was the half timid, almost half shamed answer. 'No, not in those words; but it was the same. I said I should not marry him till your innocence was established—and I will not.'

'Yes, you are right,'—still the same cold, firm repression,—'it comes to the same thing, for in that case you can never marry him. You have broken faith with me, Maggie, and you must bear the consequences. I will tell you my secret, and I lay no charge of secresy on you now. You will act as you think right to Mr. Brooks—and to yourself—for me and for myself, all I asked was silence and trust.'

She then went up to the now trembling and penitent girl, put her hand—not caressingly—on her shoulder, and said, almost as if she feared the walls would hear,

'John Frankland was my old lover; he was my cousin, too. He was a dissipated

man—then ; not now. He was on a visit to us at Cartmel—he had an intrigue with my maid, Annie, Mrs. Biles' sister. She was considered like me in person ; she was vain and unprincipled ; she loved fine clothes, delicate scents, and she was romantic. She met her lover each night in the grove near my garden, dressed in my clothes, always with my crimson Indian shawl, and perfumed with the scent I use, *eau-de-Nile* ; she was seen and mistaken for me. The story was told to old Mrs. Elmore ; she repeated it to her son, my husband. He, with Captain Horseman, watched the place. The night was dark. A gun, left by Joe Bracks, Annie's lover, fell into your father's hand, and, when the woman appeared, he recognised the shawl and the scent of the *eau-de-Nile*, and he shot her dead. Joe Bracks, Mrs. Biles, and Captain Horseman alone know of the deed. Mrs. Biles believes that it was I who was the victim. She was not undeceived. Your father, too, was not un-

deceived ; he still believes me faithless, and his deed justified.'

Pale as the palest lily, Wiggles stood before her mother, her great eyes dilated with horror.

'Then why——' she gasped.

'Why not have undeceived him ? No, child—I read your question on your lips—it was not pride, it was not revenge ; do you not understand ?—no, you cannot, love has *not* struck home to your soul yet—I *loved* him. *I love him still* ; and if he knew that he had shed innocent blood he would give himself up to justice. There is the Spartan's nature in your father. All these years he has borne his sorrow alone—for he loved me with the whole strength of his nature—and, whether mine or the wretched woman's who caused this woe, if he knew the blood he shed was innocent, he would tie the rope round his own neck and suffer gladly. Now, Maggie, the secret of my life is yours ; I have given into your hands your parents'

lives, for I live while he lives—to die with him.'

'Oh, mother, mother,' cried the girl, in a perfect abandonment of grief, 'I shall never, never feel young again.'

There was something inexpressibly touching in the cadence of the sad words that were the knell of a youth which had known no evil, to which the sorrow that hung over her mother's life had been as yet but as a sad night to know in some fortuitous hour a happy dawn. That hope was dead now, she had eaten of the coveted tree of knowledge, and she was aghast.

Then Claire took her to her arms and soothed her with many an old term of endearment, and loving words of trust and affection. The rebound of youth is always quick. Wiggles' grief spent itself; she took comfort, she was forgiven, her mother's brief resentment had passed away; they were once more all-in-all to each other. No words were spoken, but each felt a

crisis had passed. After a little, Wiggles, standing by her mother's side, arranging her wimple, said, in a timid voice,

'Before I go, mother, just one word. I could never marry Ralph Brooks now, but I shall go to Lady Calderman's gladly; it is a right thing to do; only for one year though. You promise me that?'

'Maggie, you will do what I wish you, will you not?'

'Yes.'

'Then do not break with Ralph; let things be as they are for the year of your stay with Lady Calderman. He will be a ready protection should you need one, and at the end of the year, when you come back to me, we will see what is best to be done.'

'But there is no promise between us, mother.'

'Well, let it be so. Lady Calderman will have plans and schemes for you. Test your heart well. You will see others; many will seek your favour, some, perhaps, your

hand ; if your heart has gone from you for ever, you will soon know it.'

'It seems to me that I have no room in my heart for him now,' said Wiggles, wearily, 'and even if I had, and I married him, I should be wretched ; for there would be this secret between us, a shadow for ever beside me.'

Then coffee was brought in, and soon after the brougham to take Wiggles to the station was announced. It was hurriedly arranged that she should remain quietly at the Lodge, sleeping at the Meadows, till Lady Calderman had left Cartmel, when Claire should rejoin her daughter, and make preparations for their separation. Lady Calderman was to be begged to keep Wiggles' identity a secret until the girl should join her. This would make it still practicable for Claire, as Mrs. Gilchrist, to remain unquestioned with her daughter to the last, and prevent invidious attention being directed to the inmates of the Lodge.

'And remember this, Maggie,' said Claire, as she embraced her child, 'I am happier now you know the whole secret. I feel my heart lighter than I ever thought it possible I should.'

Wiggles smiled.

'And I am forgiven quite?'

'There was nothing to forgive, darling; our mutual position was unnatural; it is better now as it is—only do not brood, Maggie. I should break my heart if I saw you grieve.'

'I can bear anything,' whispered Wiggles, 'if only there is hope. You have sorrowed without hope; but there is nothing impossible. I remember a sentence I once read, "An earnest belief in an impossibility may make it possible." Yes, dear, "Foy est tout."

CHAPTER III.

'The frivolous work of polished idleness.'

'Alas! by some degree of woe
We every bliss must gain;
The heart can ne'er a transport know
That never feels a pain.'

JUST as Wiggles stepped out of her brougham at the Paddington Station, a four-wheeler rattled up, and Mrs. Friar, in trepidation of being late, very red in the face, and presenting an altogether flustered appearance, scrambled on to the pavement, her hands and arms full of multifarious parcels. She had evidently made some promiscuous crossings over the profusely-watered streets, for her boots, which had elastic sides, and barely covered her ankles, had parted with the brilliant polish of the

morning for liberal splashes of mud, now half dry and smeary. Her gown had shared in the mishap, and was bordered with damp impurities of the streets. A porter had just taken a very *comme-il-faut* portmanteau from the brougham, the page had appropriated his mistress's bag and dust-cloak—Wiggles never travelled with parcels—and was waiting for her to precede him to the platform, when Mrs. Friar stopped the porter, and desired him to get a truck, and convey the luggage ‘all together.’ As she spoke, Wiggles advanced, holding in her hand a small bunch of half-open chrysanthemums. She stopped, very quietly, and still pale from the agitating scene she had passed through, a striking contrast to the blowsy, fussy, travel-stained little lady now face to face with her.

‘Dickson,’ she said, turning round and addressing the page, ‘call a porter for this lady,’ and then she moved on, having managed to make Mrs. Friar feel, not only

utterly inferior and insignificant, but that the slightly supercilious, very dignified, and high-bred-looking Wiggles, the despised and mysterious occupant of the Lodge, had taken her in—dirty boots, and draggled skirts, vulgar band-boxes, parcels, and all.

Instinctively, with a quick motion, she turned her head, saw the elegant brougham and its perfect appointments, and apprehended at a glance that here there was nothing of flashiness to justify any suspicion of a questionable owner. A craven qualm seized her *parvenu* instinct that she had perhaps made a huge mistake in her estimate of the denizens of the Lodge, and that, after all, they were merely eccentric ‘aristocrats’ on a gipsying expedition, and all that Dr. Norris claimed for them in the guild of respectability, and, if so, what a chance she had missed of forming a valuable acquaintance, perhaps friendship.

She feared it was almost too late to be even decently civil; for she remembered,

and she bit her lip as she remembered, that she had ducked her little round face on her ample bosom, and kept close to the hedge on a certain day not long since, when she had encountered Wiggles on the high road, and had passed her with an aggressive 'cut.' She had seen—and resented it, too, for just a flashing second—a flitting smile curl the girl's short upper lip, a smile that had begun in courteous acknowledgment of a formal introduction effected by the urbane vicar at the village school one morning.

By the time the little lady had taken her seat in the railway-carriage, and arranged her packages to her satisfaction, what with the flurry, the annoyance of her dishevelled aspect, and the irritation of her possible blunder, she was in an intermittent fever—now cold with the aforesaid qualms, now hot with irritation.

The re-appearance of Herries Heron, who arrived just in time to get a seat beside her before the train started, did not tend to

calm her perturbation ; she heartily wished she had not been so suggestively communicative to him. If things at the Lodge did clear up, why, it would be very awkward for her ; and, if they did, why, it was just possible—perhaps more than possible—that the young people, Wiggles and Mr. Heron, might make a match of it. He certainly did seem very much gone. She would try to patch up matters, and even if this hoity-toity Miss Dewar—or Wiggles, as she called herself—did turn out—well, shady, charity never did anyone any harm, and better to lose by too charitable a judgment than by a *blunder*. All this revolution in the narrow area of the worthy yeoman-farmer's—or gentleman-farmer's, as people chose to put it—wife, had been caused by a brougham which was very much ‘the thing.’ Persons in Mrs. Friar's social state of transition, and of her particular ambitions, have an apprehensive eye for the small things which seem peculiarly to mark birth and breeding—

small things which are to the connoisseur in such matters as distinguishable from their spurious imitations as are choice *morceaux* of antique porcelain from the counterfeit productions of modern factories.

But Mr. Heron was not responsive; he was not in quest of information, so he received Mrs. Friar's advances with inattentive languor, yawned, opened a sporting paper, found the light too dim, threw it on the vacant seat opposite to him, stretched his legs, put up his feet beside his discarded journal, said 'it was deuced slow work travelling in a half light,' folded his arms, and, with his head ensconced in the cushioned corner of his seat, closed his eyes. Whether Mrs. Friar discovered in these successive rudenesses choice *morceaux* of bric-a-brac, or veritable productions of modern and vulgar pottery, her *bourgeois* countenance did not declare; had a transient expression of disgust appeared, it would have been quickly effaced by a bland and

condoning smile. To Mrs. Friar, persons of Herries Heron's status were privileged.

It was seven o'clock when the train reached Bulford. Three vehicles awaited its arrival. One, a homely one-horse wagonette, with an evidently handy-man of garden and stable combined as coachman; one, a somewhat old-fashioned, but perfectly appointed close carriage with the Elmore coat-of-arms on the panel; and one, the fairy-like structure known as the 'Lodge thingimmy-gig,' with the impatient Friar Tuck between its shafts, and Daniel at his head; the Friar being uncertain under steam.

Mrs. Biles was on the platform—it was dark at seven, and she could not trust her tenant on the high-road alone, she said, after her encounter with the tramp. But as Wiggles, with real gratitude thanking Mrs. Biles for her thoughtfulness, approached her phaeton, the door of the Cartmel carriage opened, and Lady Calderman came out. She held out her hand smilingly.

Wiggles took it gravely, checking a rising sob.

'I came to meet my son,' said the former, 'but they told me at the Lodge that you were to return to-night from London. I cannot rest till I get my answer. Is it yes, Maggie?'

'It is, Lady Calderman,' replied Wiggles, her cheek as pale as the lily. 'Spare me to-night, but come to me to-morrow.'

Lady Calderman, her warm heart glowing in her eyes, drew the quiescent and subdued girl to her and kissed her. Wiggles did not respond, but Lady Calderman found a tear on her glove as she hastened to re-enter her carriage. Wiggles turned to seek her tiny chariot, and to her annoyance, almost discomfiture, came face to face with Herries, who, too amazed to do more than raise his hat mechanically and stare, made no effort to detain her. Simultaneously Mrs. Friar appeared on the scene, laden with parcels. She had been witness

of the embrace, and, in her astonishment, had let an armful of packages fall to the ground. A porter scrambled them up, and threw them into the wagonette.

Very much flushed, but inflated with servile magnanimity, she threw those she carried after them, and then hastened to Wiggles and said,

‘Oh ! Miss Dewar, pray let me drive you home ; your pony is hardly safe in this uncertain light.’

‘Thank you,’ was the answer, given with a slight upward movement of the eyebrows not lost on Mrs. Friar, ‘but I am not a bad whip, and Friar Tuck knows it. Get in, Mrs. Biles, first ; there’ll be no holding him when once I take the reins.’

Mrs. Biles obeyed gingerly, as if afraid of doing the fragile shell an injury ; but she found opportunity to say to Mrs. Friar, with whom she had frequent little passes that were not exactly friendly,

‘If Miss Dewar ’ud be advised by me,

she'd take your offer, ma'am. Farm-horses is steady-goin' cattle, which town-bred ponies isn't. Your cart too's better suited for the road nor this cockleshell.' And she gave a little self-satisfied chuckle at the happy chance of a 'dig,' as she phrased it, at 'that upsittin' Mrs. Friar.'

Wiggles, perfectly comprehending, shook the reins as she stepped lightly in. Daniel lumbered up behind in haste, and with his usual defiance, a snort and a bound, the Friar cleared the way, and the little trap disappeared like an airy vision into the night.

With a sharp return of her febrile symptoms, Mrs. Friar rejoined her parcels in her wagonette, saying to herself, as she plumped down on the substantial seat,

'Farm-horse, indeed, and cart! Beggar on horseback, she is.'

'Mother,' said Herries, as he followed Lady Calderman into the Cartmel carriage, 'who is this masquerading Wiggles?'

'She is Mr. Elmore's daughter, and Felix's sister,' was the reply.

Mr. Heron relieved his surprise with an oath. Then Lady Calderman, in a few words, related the story of her early friend, whom, for reasons of prudence, she spoke of as dead, ending by informing her son of the arrangement that would make the mysterious Wiggles an addition to their home circle.

Herries received the announcement with a flash of exultation in his bold yet sinister eye, and a sudden parting of his lips, as if of satisfaction at an unexpected gratification of a desire; but what he said was the outcome of a separate thought apart from, and yet connected with, the pleasurable object in view.

'By Jove, what a sell to Brooks, d——d presumptuous prig!'

'What do you mean, Herries? If you have no regard for my feelings, you might have for yourself; oaths are vulgar.'

'Oh! I beg your pardon, mother,' he replied, with the saving grace of a half shame; 'but I'm not responsible for my words when that mealy-mouthed bear-leader is to the front. He's over head and ears in love with this Wiggles—surrendered the very first day. I saw it. She's an awful flirt—can use her eyes; the fellow dropped at the first flash. But he'll find his level now. I'd like to see her bowl him over.'

'Herries, this sort of thing offends me. Your dislike to Mr. Brooks makes you ungenerous; but you are mistaken. Margaret Elmore is no flirt; and, as for love, such a thing, poor child, hasn't crossed her chequered path yet. Mr. Brooks admires her, I know; but so must everyone, and so do you, perhaps, just a little too much, which may account for your animosity to poor Ralph.'

Which speech roused the old Adam, who was the strong man armed, in Mr. Herries' breast, and now came to the surface with

muffled oaths and much panoply of evil passions. Cunning, however, had them well in hand; it checked them with a contemptuous smile, it inspired the words that followed.

‘Saints and sinners have one thing in common, mother—a pretty girl; and I own to you I’m a man of the world. I like poaching in Bohemia, but the most fascinating combination of cream and roses within the cordon of respectability—come-at-able, in fact, in a legitimate way—would never lure me into the net of matrimony. And I’ve no sentiment—sentiment makes me sick; never could live up to a “bright particular star.” When Wiggles was Wiggles, it was all fair and square; but now Wiggles is Miss Elmore of Cartmel—ta, ta, my fair lady. She has a sharp tongue. You’ll find that out, mother, and I hope to—Brooks will get a rough lick of it.’

‘Herries!’

‘Very sorry, mother; but Brooks is an

irritant malady in me just now—affects my *p's* and *q's*, makes me wander a little; but never mind, mother dear,—he took his mother's hand and kissed it gently—‘I'll turn over a new leaf some day, marry a pot of money, breed pigs, and eat syllabub.’

Lady Calderman's eyes filled with tears at the unwonted caress, and she said to herself, ‘He'll be all right some day; when the heart is in the right place, there is everything to hope,’—an affectionate but feeble delusion.

Wiggles did not seek her bed soon that night; she sat into the early hours of morning, writing, very slowly, a letter to Lady Calderman. This letter cost her many tears and far-away expeditions of thought; word by word parts were wrung from her, and, when she wrote her signature, ‘Margaret Elmore,’ at the close, a great tear blurred the Elmore, leaving only the sweet flower-name decipherable. And this is what she wrote:—

‘ MY DEAR LADY CALDERMAN,

‘ I have been taking counsel with myself in solitude, and I have determined to write what I have to say on the matter of my living with you. I shrink from personal discussion on the delicate subject of my mother, and I know you will respect my feeling, and take this letter as final.

‘ That I accept your generous invitation is not because my father wills me to do so, or that I follow my own inclination, for I deny my father the right he has so cruelly abrogated, and I am outraging my own feelings in coming before the world as the tardily acknowledged daughter of a dis-honoured mother ; but it is Mrs. Gilchrist’s wish that I should do so. She has been my foster-mother, my friend, my companion, the all of human relationship I have known, and she has convinced me that, in justice to my mother’s name, I ought to take the opportunity you offer of putting it in a better

light before the world. But even this strong plea would not have determined me to compromise, as it seems to me I am doing, with my father, had it not been that Mrs. Gilchrist may soon have to leave England to hide from her husband, who has treated her cruelly, and this she can do better alone; so for one year, dear Lady Calderman, I will be your guest. There is, however, one proviso I must insist upon. You must make no effort, while I am with you, to unravel the mystery of my mother's fate. I also shall take no steps in that direction. You will understand my extreme sensitiveness concerning the story, and as of course it will be revived, and for the very little while the world ever evinces interest in any particular individual, I shall be the object of unpleasant speculation, I wish to avoid anything that might, even indirectly, by rousing inquiry, draw invidious attention to my position and my father's previous neglect of me. I could not have

agreed to place myself under your protection had my father been remaining in the country. Mr. Brooks tells me he returns soon to his solitary wanderings abroad—where, I know not; so we shall run no risk of meeting, which would have been an unnatural trial for both.

‘Mrs. Gilchrist will prepare to close my house in London for a year; so in a week or two I shall be ready to begin my new life under your roof; and, dear Lady Calderman, believe me I shall do all I can to be a cheerful companion to you. There are times when I feel life very pleasant, and mere existence a joy; at others mirth seems but mockery, and the hope of happiness only a Will-o’-the-wisp. At such times I could lay me down and die, that I might rise up and live in that far land beyond the stars, where man can never more be inhuman to man, and where never yet a sigh was heard or a tear seen.

‘You will come, will you not, and see

me to-morrow?—I am writing this just on the borders of to-morrow—and arrange with me some necessary matters. Perhaps you will think that all I have said now I could have said then; but, when the mind is made up to a particular course of action, discussion can only irritate.

‘Your affectionate god-daughter,
‘MARGARET ELMORE.’

When Lady Calderman laid down this letter, she said to herself,

‘The girl is loving and tender, but she has the Elmore will.’

She did not for a moment regret the charge she had undertaken, but she owned to feeling just a little faint-hearted as to the issue, just a little repelled by the apparent strength of the girl’s character.

She was standing in the deep oriel window of the bright morning-room, leading into what had been Mrs. Elmore’s boudoir. This latter chamber had been long disused;

it had, in fact, been closed up, by order of the squire, it was understood, ever since the disappearance of its mistress ; but the former apartment was cheerful with gay chintz, recently unhollanded, fresh flowers from the greenhouses, and quaint old china. In its furniture and arrangement it was much as Mrs. Elmore had left it. There had been no females to pry into its cabinets, its pretty boxes of strange devices, and the fragile work-table of marqueterie near the low lounge by the fire, and to bring to view the delicate embroidery, the mysterious little articles of infantile apparel, yellowing cambric, and rusted needles. There they still lay as the busy fingers had left them. Some of the receptacles were locked, some open—all untouched.

The room was familiar to Lady Calderman. She was getting used to its pain. Standing in the window with the open letter in her hand, she cast a glance, pregnant with sad memories, around, gave a little

shiver, and turned to the living prospect without. The deer in twos and threes cropped the luscious patches of verdure still left under the lea of the nearly leafless trees. A hare now and again flitted timidly across the open, stopping ever and anon to rear itself with watchful alertness, sometimes to stretch itself in luxurious *abandon* in the midst of an obscuring covert of sedge. Rooks stalked majestically over the sward, no longer with catering intent for a clamorous brood, but very much at their ease in their open house of entertainment; and here and there a small flight of starlings, that, like a swift shadow from whence the eye could not trace, fell prone on the grass, to scatter the next moment like the diverse *morceaux* of glass in a kaleidoscope, then simultaneously gathering in mid-air again, to form themselves into erratic packs, and disappear in the receiving arms of the wind.

But Lady Calderman, seeing, saw not;

she was weaving a day-dream, a very pleasant dream, of which her son was the hero and sweet Maggie Elmore the heroine, in which his selfishness—thoughtlessness, she called it—and his evil doings—indiscretions, she named them—were cast aside as unlovely garments, and he was clothed upon by the shining raiment, woven by love, of generous devotion and noble deeds. It is only to a mother's and a lover's wild imagining that the Ethiopian can change his skin.

Her fancy's flight was arrested by the entrance of her daughter, Lady Claire. It was her first appearance that day; country life she found bored her, so she began the day as late as common civility to her mother permitted. Now she had a soft Indian wrap over her arm, in her hand a shady garden-hat; she moved languidly.

'Where is Herries, manma?' she said, pettishly, just touching her mother's cheek in morning greeting. 'He was to be here at twelve to take me to the stables, and now

it is half-past. Mr. Elmore, too, was to come with us. I'm all ready, and I hate being kept waiting. I daresay he has forgotten all about it. I'll go with Mr. Brooks.' And she pouted as she subsided into a large billowy chair, letting her hat drop on the ground by her side, and her head fall back on the luxurious padding, a sybarite in every curve and attitude of her voluptuous body.

'Mr. Brooks has gone to London for the day with Felix,' replied Lady Calderman. 'I have not seen Herries this morning; he breakfasted early with Felix. I had it all to myself in solitary grandeur.'

'You are so terribly energetic,' was the sleepy answer. 'Why not take things quietly? Let things come to you, don't *you* go to things; whatever goes wrong will right itself if let alone, and whatever goes right doesn't want help. Ah! mother, you're no philosopher. Your lungs were given you to breathe quietly with, not to

pant with ; feet to support you, not to hurry with. If you want anything done quickly, make others do it. What's the use of position and money if not to let your soul take its ease? the work-a-day world is a very vulgar world—no truly refined person can meddle in its matters.'

' That is not philosophy, Claire, that is selfishness ; it will end in heartlessness. But society is a work-a-day world, too, and you are a very busy-body there.'

' Ah ! that comes natural. One follows the divergencies of society without effort ; the charm of it is that, as far as heart goes, each one is sufficient to himself, and so no exhausting emotion is required. Some persons are liked a little more than others—make points, so to speak, a little better ; but even they, when they drop out—die, perhaps—are scarcely missed, and a season is far too short for more than a tributary sigh. The little nebulous eddying they made as they dropped into the Styx soon

ceases, and Society's surface is as unruffled as before. Better so, mother. Emotion ages, feeling lines the face, and tears dim the eyes. Oh, dear, I wonder where Herries is !'

' Did you hear from Hugh to-day, Claire ?' asked Lady Calderman, sighing. She was used to her daughter's vegetative disquisitions, and seldom argued with her. At one period she felt almost glad that she had so little heart. 'She will not be called upon to suffer as I have suffered,' she said. But she was beginning to understand from her own awakening to better things that deadness of heart might mean deadness of soul ; and better any suffering on this side the Great Divide than that. The dead soul *here* would be the quick spirit *there*.

' From Hugh ? Yes ; but I haven't read his letter through yet. I thought I would wait until I had returned from the stables, and had rested. Don't you think country air exhausting ?' and she yawned. ' I read,

though, that he wants me to spend the Christmas at Treville Mead. Oh! and, by the way, he says there is a split in the Cabinet, and that, I suppose, means dissolution.'

'Yes, and a general election, and everything topsy-turvy,' and Lady Calderman looked disturbed. She dreaded the excitement into which she would be pretty sure to be drawn.

'There's one comfort,' said the Lady Claire, 'it will be all over before the season; but everybody will be somebody else, and we shall have to learn our social catechism over again. I hope the Tories will come in; there are always so many queer people stranded on us with the Liberals. I wish Hugh would give up politics; they are *so* enervating.'

Then Herries came in.

'I beg your pardon, Claire,' he said; 'but I rode into Bulford with Felix, and then I met the trainer, and went to see a young

horse schooled. This is a queer turn-up about Miss Elmore, isn't it?

And then it appeared that Lady Calderman had not taken her daughter into her confidence. But Lady Claire was not *exigeante*; she received her mother's explanation in good part, showed a little more interest than usual in the strange circumstances of the story, said she had seen 'Wiggles,' and had thought her very *comme il faut*, wondered how she would take in society, said her mother was a brave woman, was really glad, though, she had such an interest in her *triste* life, and then asked if her father knew of the arrangement.

He did not as yet, Lady Calderman said; but it did not matter, he never interfered with her—he had never had occasion.

It was characteristic of Lady Calderman that to her children she always spoke of her husband with respect, and never under any aggravation took them into her confidence on the subject of the frequent indignities to which she was subjected. She even,

in the loyalty of her true woman's heart, framed little fictions, how she would consult him on some moot point, or excused herself from a projected plan on the score, 'Your father might not like it.' Even Herries—whose reverence for his father, never very pronounced, had died a natural death since his own arrival at man's estate—even Herries, following fast in his evil footsteps, never hazarded a disrespectful word before his mother of his parent; but what of filial affection he possessed was hers, and that in a measure was, for Herries' hardening nature, strong. Once he said to his father, on the occasion of a fierce dispute respecting a horse entered for a race, in which their interests clashed, the former bidding him go to the d——l, if there was one,

'When I look at you, I have as little doubt that there is a devil, as I'm sure there are angels, when I look at my mother.'

But usually the father and son hit it off pretty well together; for their vices they learnt to have separate hunting-grounds,

and in their legitimate pleasures their tastes were similar. Both were men of renown in the saddle, both were crack shots, and both could use the gloves with science.

Lady Calderman had learnt, on her part, to show an even surface of indifference to her lord's irregularities and callous neglect of her—half the world said she did not know of his vices, the other half that she did not care, and to him she always bore a gentle, if coldly reserved, demeanour, which, irritating him, yet forced an answering respect and guarded observance.

When Lady Claire seemed to have exhausted her questioning, Lady Calderman abruptly changed the subject by informing Herries of the threatened break-up of the Cabinet.

‘And, oh ! mamma,’ interrupted Lady Claire, ‘Hugh says that, if they do go to the country, they’ll have to find a seat for Mr. Frankland, as he’ll never be returned again by his present constituency ; but what that is, I’m sure I don’t know.’

'Scampton,' said Herries. 'Why, he walked the course when he was elected; stood for them by requisition; a queer turn-over, surely, for they are neither fish nor flesh as far as politics are concerned. Frankland was a Scampton man, and they were proud of his being a Cabinet Minister—that was about it.'

'Hugh says'—Lady Claire referred to her husband's half-read letter—"it was something about a local bill; he refused to father it or to back it, when it found a parent in Mr. Mardell, a Tory—a case of "*après moi le déluge*," I suppose.'

'Mr. Frankland is not a rich man,' observed Lady Calderman; 'a contested election would try him sorely. But I don't think he is one to stand turning out quietly.'

'No; he has no end of pluck, and he has done a great deal for the little rotten borough; he'll have a turn up with them first. Come on, Claire,' and the brother and sister strolled off in the direction of the stables.

CHAPTER IV.

'There's a gude and a bad side to a string, a' the airt's in findin' it oot.'

IN the afternoon of the same day, Lady Calderman again visited Wiggles in her little retreat. The meeting was cordial on both sides; but a mutual restraint made the conversation a little formal. It was arranged that the former should leave Cartmel the end of the week—it was now Wednesday—and go to Monkswood, her country-seat, some thirty miles distant from London, and sixty from Bulford, where Wiggles, in her proper character as 'Miss Elmore,' was to join her, accompanied by a new maid, the hiring of whom Lady Calderman undertook.

It was thought better, for obvious reasons,

that she should be attended by a stranger, ignorant of her antecedents. Lady Calderman, though drawn to Wiggles by her winning attractiveness, and opening wide her heart to her for her mother's sake, and pitifulness for her painful position, was yet half repelled by the girl's evident determined reticence and her half-hearted confidence. In their converse she could see that the guards were constantly up, and not a word that could compromise was allowed to escape. To the *rôle*, as specified in her letter of the previous night, Wiggles kept closely, and Lady Calderman felt that she dared not even attempt to swerve from her allotted part of the compact. On open ground to all the world she found the girl frank and communicative, full of sharp observation and wonderful social knowledge, well-up in matters of the day, and by no means backward in giving pronounced opinions.

‘ If she were anyone's daughter but Mar-

garet Elmore's, I should find her a charming companion ; but I feel to her somewhat as I feel to Claire since she married—there's something between us. Ah ! she is a true Elmore—in will.'

It had been her intention to discover, directly or indirectly, Wiggles' sentiments regarding Ralph Brooks, but her heart failed her, and, simple as the question need have been to elicit an informing answer, none was put ; consciousness held it back. She knew intuitively that the girl would divine her intent, and she feared she might resent it. With this impression, she even avoided mentioning Ralph's name, and when, in relation to Felix, Wiggles adverted to him, she let her eyes drop on her lap, almost deprecatingly. Had she not been so self-conscious, she would have gained the knowledge she craved in the quick-rising of vivid bloom on Wiggles' cheek, and in her quickly-averted eyes.

'And my menagerie, dear Lady Calder-

man?' said Wiggles, suddenly. 'You see, I must shut up the house in town, and, though the cook and gardener will remain in town, that would be poor company for Gog and Magog, they are so sociable; then, as for Lingo, she couldn't live without some one to talk to; and Bob there would never take to strangers. You see, we have never been separated. Leah and Rab, too, would simply howl themselves to death. The only responsibility I could provide for conscientiously is Meg, and I think Mrs. Biles would take care of her; the cream would be a consolation, you see, and there are no draughts in the Meadows sitting-room.'

Wiggles delivered herself of this speech trippingly—a little mischievously, perhaps—but she looked up at the elder lady with a pretty demureness which had in it just a suspicion of pleading.

'And ah! I forgot,' she added, with gravity, 'there's Tad and Pole,' pointing to the glass bowl in which the salamanders

were disporting themselves slimily ; ‘ but they are ornamental, and I daresay you’d like them in the drawing-room.’

Lady Calderman gave a start, and looked for the moment not a little puzzled. Wiggles rose, brought the box containing the marmozette monkeys, sat down close beside her visitor, carefully undid the warm felt wrapping that enveloped it, opened the lid, and said, ‘ Look, dear Lady Calderman, aren’t they darlings ?’

All that was to be seen was a faintly-breathing mass of soft fur, which, when looked at intently, discovered two little pitiful faces, with soft pleading eyes, which blinked as the heads drew closer together.

‘ My dear child, take care !’ cried Lady Calderman, shrinking back. ‘ I—I really know nothing about animals ; don’t let them out. And these—these lizards—whatever are they ?—oh, dear, no, I should not like anything living in the drawing-room or any room I have to do with. Are you very

devoted to your pets, dear? Polly might go to the housekeeper's room, and Bully into the aviary; and, as for your dogs, they shall have a nice kennel to themselves at the stables. Herries has a great many fox-terriers, and, I believe, two bull-dogs, so they will be well looked after. Meg will be very safe with good Mrs. Biles, I am sure; and don't you think the—the lizards would, too, and the—rats?"

Wiggles burst into a merry peal of laughter, which emulated Lingo to a display of her cachinatory accomplishments, that made Gog and Magog cower closer together; called forth an angry-yelp from Rab, and a dignified growl from Leah; made Tad and Pole slip under the rocky erection in their domicile, and tuned up Bob's German air in its loudest key. Only Meg remained quiescent, save for an angry frisk of the tip of her great brush curled round her head as she lay dormant on a soft Cashmere wrap on the low basket-chair.

‘My dear child,’—Lady Calderman could not help laughing too,—‘ why, this is Babel !’

Wiggles restored order by a judicious apple to Lingo, and then, resuming her seat, she said, very prettily and imploringly,

‘ You said I was to have your daughter’s room, dear Lady Calderman, and that it had steps down to a garden. May I not have my family there, in the room, I mean ? They’re no trouble to anybody, never did a bit of mischief in their innocent lives, and they’re such company ! I should miss them terribly ; it would seem as if all my old home had been taken from me. Leah might perhaps live at the stables, with Friar Tuck, but Rab and I have never been apart. He might have his kennel in the garden, underneath my sitting-room. The bulldogs would kill him right off ; he won’t stand any nonsense, not even from a mastiff—bristles up, and goes at anything that aggravates him ; but oh ! he’s so tender

where he knows he can trust—aren't you, Rab darling? Give this lady a paw, and say "how do you do?"'

Rab looked into Lady Calderman's eyes a full second, then solemnly lifted his shaggy paw, and tendered it with a double yelp that sounded amicable. This, Wiggles said, meant 'how do you do.'

Lady Calderman was won over on the instant. She patted the little beast—very wise in its generation—and said,

'Very well, Rab, you shall come too. Yes, we'll be friends.'

At which Rab laid his long nose on her lap confidently.

'He's thanking you,' said Wiggles, as she bent and kissed the dog between his eyes.

'And, Maggie dear, bring Meg, too, if you like,' she added.

At the moment, her heart was large enough for even rats; however, she was relieved to hear Gog and Magog were not 'vermin,' but 'rare, gentle, and delicate,'

loving marmozette monkeys.' Their attributes she took on trust.

'No, not Meg,' said Wiggles, hastily; 'Mr. Heron's fox-terriers might be too attentive;' and she smiled. 'But you are so good; only, you see, what should I do without my family?'

Then Lady Calderman persuaded Wiggles to accompany her on a visit to Dr. Norris at the Vicarage. 'I want you to know my daughter, too,' she said. 'She is in the carriage, waiting below.'

'All this time?' said Wiggles, distressed.

'Oh, she has Ouida to console her. She won't mark time.'

The introduction took place in the carriage. Lady Claire looked actually animated. She liked the fair young face that beamed beneath its shady hat like a blush rose in shadow. All things lovely and fair gratified her keen appreciation—which, nevertheless, was animal—of the beautiful. Her love of ease, luxury, and the *dolce-far-*

niente of life outbid any personal vanity she possessed, and of which no woman, comely and pleasing, is devoid. She admired handsome looks as she admired handsome pictures, with no thought of self-contrast.

The young women shook hands with a spontaneous cordiality.

‘ You are to take my place,’ said Lady Claire. ‘ I can recommend my mother. She is not *exigeante*, she is reasonable—and—she won’t want you to do much for her. Poor darling! She has the Nineteenth Century disease of energy.’

‘ Which,’ returned Wiggles, archly, ‘ you have happily escaped.’

‘ You would not have thought so,’ said Lady Calderman, smilingly, ‘ if you had seen her at her first reception this season. I could not believe it was Claire. There were over three hundred people, and she shook hands with them all; never once sat down, I believe, and talked—how you did talk, Claire!—she had a word for everybody. I

know I never took such trouble at my receptions.'

'Ah!' replied Claire, with a little shiver of memory—'ah, that was an initiatory effort! I made my reputation then; no need to repeat the performance. Hugh was satisfied, and it did him good. We are Tories, you see, Miss Elmore. I mean my people are; but I married into a Liberal family, and it was necessary. It would have done him harm if I had not been cordial. He is a rising man; so the game *was* worth the candle. A Conservative's, or rather Tory's—I like the word better—politics are inherited, a Liberal's are evolved out of his consciousness; so he's never so sure of his ground. Ah! tradition is a grand rallying force.'

'I like politics,' observed Wiggles, simply, 'and I am sure I should like a political life.'

'Have you a creed?'

'Well—yes.' Wiggles hesitated.

'Evolved or inherited?' asked Lady Calderman, slyly.

‘I don’t know; you must judge. It is this—to vote, independent of party, on the merits of the question solely, to pin faith to no leader absolutely, but to defer to the powers that be in all matters, not touching conscience—just the reverent doctrine of rendering unto Cæsar his imperial due, and to give opponents credit for honesty of purpose.’

‘I think, fair Margaret,’ said Claire, ‘that it is *just* as well you are not called on to meddle in political life; you would make a *fiasco*, that would be all. There are three things of which our senate are intolerant—enthusiasm, credulity, and honesty; these are splendid banners for the hustings. You must furl them in the forum.’

‘Claire,’ said Lady Calderman, astonished, ‘you are waking up! Is this Hugh or yourself?’

‘Oh! not Hugh, mother,’ she made a little *move*; ‘his father, perhaps. I’ve been lazily taking the old man in, and I

understand the little game men call politics better now. He was a force. Hugh has only to follow his lead, and I don't think he'll miss making points. He's sure to rise—he has no convictions.'

Wiggles looked amazed.

'The speeches read very well,' she observed, a little flatly; she felt puzzled.

'Oh! I'm no judge of oratory—never read a speech through in my life; tried to skim through one of Hugh's on the ballot, and fell asleep. Poor Hugh! he didn't like it. In reality I'm political only in social interests. You see my husband is a *nouveau riche*—has his position to make yet. His father's reputation gives him a lift, but that is all; so place is his aim, quite independent of politics, though of course he can only attain place through a particular phase of the game. The Conservatives like to encourage new men, especially if they are wealthy, and the Trevilles are millionaires—that is, the old man is, and then he—

Hugh—is able. He's safe for the Colonies, I think.'

'I was reading,' said Wiggles, 'only last week—in some evening paper, I think—that, if the Conservatives consulted their future, they would bring men of the people more forward, would get a tenant-farmer, or even an intelligent yokel returned to Parliament. It would—so ran the article—cut the ground from under the levelling Radicals.'

'They did try it once,' said Lady Calderman, 'and they couldn't get a man—not a respectable one, I mean. I fancy their manœuvre was scented. To my idea, it told well for the Tories that not a cat's-paw was to be found amongst them.'

'I daresay they made only one try,' suggested Wiggles; 'they wouldn't have the scheme very greatly at heart.'

'You are right, Miss Elmore,' said Lady Claire; 'they didn't want to succeed. The attempt answered their purpose just as well.'

The carriage had made, at Lady Calderman's instance, a considerable *détour*, and now stopped at the gates of the vicarage. Dr. Norris was at home, and the three ladies entered his pretty drawing-room together. Pretty is hardly the term to apply, the room being panelled in black oak and draped in crimson. On the panels hung prints of Church dignitaries—Pusey, Liddon, Vaughan, Temple, and others, with their college arms on a shield above.

Books filled every available space, on tables, on shelves, and in open cases; old china, not a little battered by cleansing Phyllises, was huddled on the mantelpiece, and in a recess beside the fireplace fitted with shelves. Old-fashioned vases were filled with the few lingering flowers of a vanishing autumn, and grasses were arranged in bunches on the mantelshelf among the rickety shepherds and dilapidated shepherdesses. The rug was occupied by two cats and a toothless sheep-dog, and in a

corner window a cinnamon canary trilled a not very vigorous lay. The windows—the large one opening out on stone steps leading to the garden—had all small diamond-shaped panes, and were set in heavy stonework.

In the very centre of the garden plot of green—a small velvety lawn—stood a grand old mulberry-tree, a magnificent object in itself, but drearily obstructive of light in the rather melancholy room described. Beyond the tree ran a broad river; glimpses in gleams could be caught of it when, the summer sun was bright, shining through the mulberry's foliage. In winter it was plainly visible, but then no longer bright, but cold and dark. Everyone suggested the demolition of the tree, but not an axe had as yet had the temerity to raise its head against it. Sentiment kept it intact. Dr. Norris was of a melancholy disposition—the tree did not offend him. He loved its shade of summer evenings, and its fruit

gave him opportunities for kindly offerings to his neighbours.

A cheery fire burnt in the brass grate ; the room, if dull in its outlook, was withal cosy within. Dr. Norris was there, arranging some small parcels on a side-table, evidently just cleared for the purpose. He left his occupation to receive his visitors, which he did with cordiality.

' I have come to see you the very first, dear Dr. Norris,' said Wiggles, hesitating a moment—' the very first in my proper name as Margaret Elmore. I often thought you suspected who I was ; it is my father's wish that I should take his name at last.'

The old man took the girl's two hands in his, led her to the full light, looked in her face for a solemn second, then bent gently forward and kissed her brow.

' For your dear mother's sake,' he half whispered. ' Yes, my dear, I guessed who you were from the first. Then your father returns for good to Cartmel, does he ?'

Wiggles explained. He shook his head.

'All wrong—all wrong,' he said; 'but it can't be helped. Lady Calderman is a good woman. She will be a mother to you, my dear.' He turned to the latter as he spoke and added—'This room is not unfamiliar to you, Lady Calderman. There have been few changes in it since—since you were last here—how many years ago?'

'Eighteen,' she replied, in a low voice.

'Ah, yes,' looking involuntarily at Wiggles, who, with Lady Claire, was making herself intimately acquainted with his mutilated treasure of rare old porcelain—'painfully like, is she not? The boy is an Elmore.'

'You did not meet Mr. Elmore when he was here?' she asked.

'No, certainly not, and I never wish to do so. You were her friend, too, eighteen years ago.'

'Am still—do not judge me. It was for her child's sake I came to Cartmel; she is to be my daughter for a whole year. You

used to be charitable to a fault. Trust me still.'

She spoke hastily, and in a half-whisper. Dr. Norris smiled sadly, but he took her hand, which she had held out, as if appealingly.

'I believe in your kind, good heart, Lady Calderman,' he said—'forgive me if contradictory actions bewilder me. I am getting old, and cannot follow clearly the intricacies of the world's "yea" and "nay".'

She drew her hand away, and her eyes filled with tears ; but, advancing to the window, she said in her natural voice, though a little tremulously,

'My old enemy, the mulberry-tree, has increased oppressively.'

'Yes,' he answered, looking fondly at the great tree, with its sparse foliage of yellowing green that seemed to droop despairingly over the withered heaps of leaves below—'yes, but it has wider intentions in the same direction ; it will have to go some time, I fear, but not in my day.'

'Why not?' said Wiggles, suddenly, approaching the old man with a group of old Chelsea in her hand, of which not a single figure was intact. 'No fitter executioner for anything time-honoured than an iconoclast. Do you see this, sir?' and she held up the dilapidated piece of what had been an exquisite specimen of rare old Bow, in itself a perfect work of art.

'There are six figures,' she said, categorically, 'with only one nose among them. So there are none for *it* to put out of joint. The goat has lost his beard, and it has been mended with a piece of his tail; a court dame has exchanged heads with an old fop, and a shepherd's crook has repaired the branch of the thorn-tree: Ingenious, to say the least, and clever cribbing from other melancholy ruins. Dear Dr. Norris'—she waved her hand in the direction of the crowded recess and mantel-piece—'the excavations of Pompeii were merciful in comparison. In the sacred name of Art, I

protest. Give me the melancholy fragments before it is too late. You shall have the new lectern you want. You shall order it yourself—solid brass, spread eagle, and all.'

The vicar watched her animated face, full of arch fun; then he took the group in his hand, and examined it curiously.

'Some mistake here in zoology,' he said, drily. 'Mrs. Friar and her daughters are responsible for them. They undertook to restore—and, according to modern precedent, they have succeeded well.'

'Is it a bargain?' she asked, eagerly.

He cast a reluctant eye on his ill-conserved treasures, then mentally faced the rickety oak lectern in his dearly loved church, and said, half aloud,

'Solid brass, mediæval carvings; and then, with pleased transition to his natural key, placed the group in the happy girl's hand, and said, 'Yes, a bargain, but a very one-sided one, I fear—such a lectern will cost a large sum.'

'When Art is in jeopardy, I never count the cost,' she laughed. 'I am good for three figures, if needs be. May I ring for a clothes-basket and a little hay?'

Lady Claire had subsided into a low chair of doubtful ease, but she had requisitioned two down pillows from the old-fashioned sofa, and was comfortable. Lazily amused, she listened to Wiggles' bargaining.

'We'll do a little business together, you and I,' she said to Wiggles, nodding her head. 'There's a bit of Palissy I covet. It's a small dish, and the insects and other specimens have got mixed a little, restored, I should say. It is unique both ways—originally, and as it is. It's a study. I covet it. The B. P. is all right. Were they heirlooms, Dr. Norris?' she asked, with half-closed eyes.

'No,' replied the old man, kindly. 'I got them strangely; and, to tell the truth, they've been rather a white elephant all these years; but there they were, and I

let them be. When I was a college tutor, I did some private coaching as well, and a young fellow I pulled through with difficulty left them to me in his will. He was a terrible spendthrift; couldn't pay my fees; got fever, and died. That's their story. He had a good eye, they tell me, for china.'

The basket was brought, and in an incredibly short time Wiggles had filled it. She would have no help. The room was getting a little dusk, Lady Calderman went round the walls, renewing her acquaintance with the pictures, and Lady Claire took forty winks. The vicar stood by Wiggles, and obediently handed her the china, piece by piece.

Just as the last bit had been carefully embedded in the fodder, the door opened, and Mrs. Friar and her two daughters were announced. The little lady was in visiting attire, *en grande tenue*, in fact, according to her lights, and her daughters were brilliant in home-made costumes of corn-flower blue,

and hats trimmed with poppies. In her hand she carried a basket. She had seen the Cartmel carriage in waiting, and her countenance was ready dressed in an agreeable smile, just a faint shade deprecatory, as of pleasure and uncertainty in one. With old-fashioned civility, Dr. Norris introduced his visitors to each other. The Miss Friars retired into the window, shyly, and made whispered comments, nudging each other with their elbows, and watching Wiggles' every movement, as if she were a *curios*, which doubtless she was to them.

Lady Calderman rose to depart, not following up the introduction with any remark.

Wiggles, her eyes just a little contracted, half archly, half contemptuously, had returned Mrs. Friar's effusive bow and half proffered hand with a distant acknowledgment, ignoring the effort at friendliness; but the aspiring lady was not to be so easily repelled.

Parasite climbers, in human as in vegetable economy, are peculiarly adaptive to circum-

stances. Deprived of extraneous support, they for the moment crawl; but soon, with invigorated feelers, they find an accommodating substitute, and rear their heads as loftily as before. The genus is irrepressible.

Lady Claire had dropped her handkerchief. She had gathered herself up from her easy lounge, and just as Mrs. Friar, with a little inarticulate cough, had allowed her half stretched-out hand to drop at her side, as of purpose, she was contemplating her fallen property, too inert to stoop for its recovery. Quickly, Mrs. Friar took in her pose, and, making a little friendly movement forward, she picked up the flimsy article and restored it to its owner.

'Oh! thank you,' said Claire. 'I was just wondering if it were worth the trouble of stooping. When one sits long in a low chair, not perfectly cushioned, one's back gets weak.'

'And you have crushed that lovely tie,' said Mrs. Friar, as Claire proceeded to

replace a light wrap of silk and lace round her throat. ‘That is just the colour I want to get for the new cloaks’—then, seeing she was not understood, explained—‘for the Hepzibah charity here, in Perrypip. It gives clothing and education to twelve girls yearly. I am its director; but some of the ladies on the committee are averse to sombre grey, and dusky browns or drabs. Now,’ speaking as if suddenly inspired, ‘now if you and the countess, and your very charming young friend, who *will* be such a recluse, would stop a few minutes, and give us the benefit of your taste, you would confer a really artistic boon on the—the—picturesque. Just imagine to yourself twelve girls, ranging from five to ten years old, clad in that exquisite peacock-blue, sitting in the chancel of grand old Perrypip Church, the soft light from the great coloured window falling on them, so in harmony, so in unison, so tasteful, so artistic,—Mrs. Friar never lacked words,

though she might eloquence,—‘and then just imagine the effect of drab instead. *I* say we have no right to clothe charity girls in neutral tints—we should show up the charity in prononcé hues. A number of strangers come to see our beautiful, old Norman church, and I’m sure they never see the Hepzibah school ; they—the school —are all in brown, just the colour of their seats.’

By this time the energetic little lady had got to the table on which Dr. Norris had placed the small parcels, and was opening them. Lady Claire, indolently amused, stood by her.

‘Stop, mamma,’ she said, as Lady Calderman was bidding the vicar adieu, ‘I want to see the patterns for the school cloaks. Mrs. Friar wishes our opinion on the colour.’

Lady Calderman good-naturedly turned back and joined her daughter. Wiggles was superintending the removal of the basket with her new acquisition. Dr.

Norris followed her. They returned together, laughing. Mrs. Friar was in good heart ; she was speaking on friendly terms with a real live ‘peeress of the realm,’ as she described Lady Calderman to her daughters driving home, and to the wife of a coming statesman. She had also asserted her position as a ‘county lady.’ So altogether she felt equal to any complication.

‘Please, Miss—Wi—Miss Dewar,’ she said, as Wiggles came in, ‘do give us your vote too. I know you have exquisite taste, for I never admired any mauve so much as that of your nun’s “habit;” to tell you the truth,’ she added, candidly and very cleverly, ‘I was almost afraid of you at first. I feared you might be a papist, and, of course, would not wish to know such a staunch supporter of church and state’—looking at Lady Calderman—‘as I am. However, I did myself the pleasure of calling on you to-day, and am happy at this opportunity of explaining my tardiness.’

Wiggles said not a word. She knew the aggravating value of a cold silence, but she did not put on any scornful airs. Wiggles could assert herself without those vulgar aids. She simply stood very still, and seemingly very attentive. Mrs. Friar got red; she dashed on—

‘Besides, I understood that you courted retirement, that you did not wish to enter society.’

Wiggles smiled and said,

‘Mrs. Biles was quite right; but you mistake—I had no objection to know my village neighbours. However, it is not too late. I am only too pleased to be of any use. It is about the children’s cloaks, is it not?’

‘Yes,’ put in Lady Claire. ‘Mrs. Friar is the matron, or something of the sort, I believe, and she goes in for peacock-blue—very advanced of Perrypip, I say.’

Poor Mrs. Friar!—a charity matron, a village neighbour. Ah! the parasite had flung its tendrils on too lofty a growth, and

an airy breeze had dislodged them. She nearly choked. She dared not for the moment trust her voice.

'Oh ! peacock-blue by all means,' cried Wiggles, and 'Peacock-blue, certainly,' echoed Lady Calderman.

'Then peacock-blue be it,' re-echoed the worthy vicar ; 'only we shall be an eyesore, I fear,' and he chuckled at his feeble bit of wit, explaining his little joke. 'Argus eyes, you know.'

Opportunely a servant brought in tea. It was served in fair old china, it was potent and well-flavoured. Claire approved.

'It revives me,' she said—'delicious. There is nothing like country tea and cream,' helping herself to a liberal allowance. She was not so confident about the accompaniment in the shape of a hot tea-cake, the manufacture of the vicar's time-old kitchen duenna, and on which she specially prided herself.

Wiggles had taken a piece.

‘I recommend it, Lady Claire,’ she said.
‘I’ve often tasted it; it is peculiar to the
vicarage.’

Then, seeing the Miss Friars were too shy
to come forward, she took the dish and
handed it to them, telling them to demolish
it while it was hot, which they did.

In a little while Mrs. Friar recovered,
partially. True to the instincts of her
genus, she said,

‘I hope you will make an exception in
my favour, and not ignore society while you
are here. We shall have some hunt lunches
this year.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Wiggles, gently,
‘but I am going away immediately. I shall
not even have time to return your visit.
Good-bye,’ and she bowed condescendingly
to the little lady, and followed Lady Cal-
derman, who had made her adieux, and, with
the vicar, was gone to seek her carriage.

When Dr. Norris returned, he found Mrs.
Friar hot and red.

'I can't say much for your *protégée's* manners,' she said. 'Who is she? I believe Lady Calderman affects patronage, and Lady Claire is in love with the stage—always at the theatre. This Miss Dewar, or Wiggles, is perhaps some well-known actress—artistes, as they call themselves. It was to please you I called at last; really, Dr. Norris, I wish I hadn't.'

'It would, perhaps, have been as well,' was the calm answer, given a little markedly. 'The young lady is Miss Elmore, the daughter of Squire Elmore. Lady Calderman is going to bring her out, at her father's desire. And now, please, we won't discuss the story; it is a painful one. I was Mrs. Elmore's friend; her child is very like her. Have you decided on the colour?' and he took up a package of patterns from the table.

Mrs. Friar knew her pastor too well to do more than give an ejaculation of surprise, and express her regret that he had

not told her sooner. It was, however, some satisfaction to throw aside the approved peacock-blue, and substitute a yellowish-brown in its place as ‘more serviceable, after all, and really æsthetic.’

The doctor was indifferent; he let his too active aide-de-camp have her way, offered her more tea, and then gladly conveyed her and her daughters, who had not once opened their lips in conversation, to their wagonette.

CHAPTER V.

'Oh, sir, the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy "Man,"
And its hero the conqueror, Worm.'

THE next day but one, Lady Calderman and her daughter left Cartmel. Felix had returned from his hurried visit to his father in London in a state of mind that made him, as Herries said, 'deuced slow company.' He did not discuss his newly acquired information concerning his parents with his friend, and that friend was man of the world enough to show no curiosity on the part which had come to his knowledge through his mother.

'Wig—that is Miss Dewar—is not Wiggles, or Miss Dewar either,' the former said,

with his usual lucidity of explanation ; ‘she’s my sister, Heron. There was some family row, I believe—so my father tells me. However, that is all made up, and your mother, it seems, is to bring her—that is Wig—Miss Dewar—no, dash it ! Maggie—Miss Elmore, my sister—out. So, old fellow, she’s Miss Elmore now, and that’s all about it.’

‘All right, my dear fellow. I was always one for washing one’s dirty linen at home, so is my mother, as you know. We’ve no business with each other’s insides, as Mrs. Biles said one day I asked her an injudicious question about—about her tenants. It’s very jolly having a sister, you’ll find. It’s always somebody as a go-between, or to grumble to, or to bully if somebody else has been bullying you. Claire was good-natured—she helped me out of no end of scrapes. She’s got terribly lazy, though, now ; not much brains ever, and a beastly cad for a husband. However, she’s safe in

a financial 'emergency ;' and the graceless young fellow laughed.

' You're a cool hand, Herries,' said Felix, evidently reassured at his friend's indifference, which relieved him from awkward fencing. ' I'm not used to the situation yet, I know, but it seems to me as if a sister's something to take care of; to mother and father in a juvenile-manly sort of way, at least that's how I feel; and mean to do, too. I'd just like to see the fellow that would harm her ;' and Felix squared at an imaginary aggressor, looking by no means a contemptible foe, as Herries mentally noted.

' Oh,' he said, viciously, ' Brooks will help you with heart and hand.'

Felix looked puzzled.

' Why, Brooks was my tutor—girls don't have tutors.'

' No, not for their brains, but their hearts sometimes ;' and Herries sneered as he lit a cigar.

' Hang it ! Herries, when you're in one

of your moods, I never know whether you are hitting or fencing. You hate Brooks—speak out, can't you, like a man ?'

' My dear Felix '—Herries blew the smoke of the fragrant weed into a graceful column above his head—' I've a natural antipathy to grave *dominies*. Ever since Arnold was canonised, they've been obtrusive. Education is a governmental craze, a big factory of shoddy, with rag-pickers for professors.'

' I say, Herries, your tongue's a caution.'

' The only thing the Rads have left us. I tell you what, Felix, education should have been kept what it was in the good old days, an arsenal for arming the privileged classes, whose self-interest would prevent their using their weapons against the State.'

' Seems to me,' said Felix, drily, ' that a good many of the non-privileged classes took to arming themselves. I know I'm not a clever fellow in politics, or anything wanting head-piece, but I can see this clear enough, that if we hadn't made a virtue of

necessity, and thrown open this arsenal, as you call it, it would have been forced open from without.'

'A free distribution of dynamite. I appeal to posterity;' and Herries flung forward a vapoury messenger to an imaginary future. 'Ah, "knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers."

'Do you know what Brooks says? he's rather liberal, you know: "Better men should perish one by one, than earth should stand at gaze, like Joshua's sun in Ajalon."

Herries took his cigar from his mouth in the very middle of a draught, and literally gaped at his companion.

'What!' he said—'Saul also among the prophets!'

'With a shaft from your own quiver;' and Felix laughed heartily.

'Felix, if you take to politics, I—I'll cut you!'

'Cut me out, you mean, old fellow—no fears—only I'm not for sticks-in-the-mud;

we must keep up to the times.' And then, rather incontinently, 'Arnold was a grand man—Brooks was educated by him, you know.'

Herries emitted an angry puff, and knocked the red ash from off his cigar.

'Then let him take orders, and they'll make him a bishop; there's nothing like the mitre for extinguishing. D——d social revolution, everything;—pedagogues, demagogues, and pill-boxes, upper-crust; there'll soon be no standing-room for gentlemen.' Then, with a burst as of uncontrollable disgust, he added—'You're as blind as a bat, Felix; the fellow's in love with Wig—with your sister, and it's pretty plain you have no objection.'

'Brooks!—my sister!' Felix flushed angrily. 'You're beside yourself, Herries.'

'I am not mad, most noble Felix;' and Herries sneered.

'Well,' replied Felix, hotly, 'you've no excuse, then. Why, Brooks is——'

‘Forty.’

‘No, he’s only thirty-five; but that’s double her age—besides, he’s scarcely spoken to her.’

‘“Her eye in silence hath a speech
Which eye best understands,”’

said Herries, with sarcastic slowness; ‘which same I mean as an eye-opener to you, old fellow, and no offence.’ And then, in a frank, friendly tone, he added—‘To be candid with you, Elmore, I’m gone myself in that quarter; it’s that, perhaps, which opened my eyes. I think she is simply bewitching. I never saw anything like her, but she’s been brought up so quietly, she’ll perhaps believe in this grave and reverent signior, and I’m not going to run against anything but a thorough-bred. Is Lady Calderman a patron of your tutor?’

Felix looked just a little mystified, and not a little surprised; then he delivered himself as follows:

‘Why, Herries, she cheeked you awfully,

and you hadn't a good word for her ; and as for Brooks, he tells me everything, and he never even said he admired her ; besides, now I think of it, the few times she saw him she scarcely looked at him, not even when she had to speak to him, and she never once chaffed him, as she was always doing me. My own private opinion is that she is not of a spoony nature.'

'An experienced opinion is always valuable,' observed Herries, drily ; 'but you forget the tramp affair—she's romantic, that's certain, or she wouldn't come gipsying down here ; so he, of course, is a hero, and I know for certain he's at the Lodge every day, though I don't say he always gets in.'

'Joe Bracks told me,' said Felix, brightening up, as if under a pleasanter aspect of the subject, 'that the tramp was a powerful fellow, but in Brooks' clutches of no more count than a stripling—that he held him with a grip of iron, and gave him a thrashing that must have smashed some of his bones.'

'Practice makes perfect,' sneered Herries. Felix stared, then, perceiving, cried, hotly, 'What do you mean?—he never raised a finger to me.'

'No, I suppose not—no need; but he was trained to it, of course. Why, it's part of the profession.'

With Machiavellian cunning, Herries sought to depreciate the office his rival had held over Felix, and to rouse his social prejudices; but his cunning was wasted force. Felix had mixed so little in society that he did not as yet understand the sliding-scale of grade. He understood, however, that Herries was bent on detraction, and he set it down to jealousy. He laughed.

'Brooks will be a great swell some day. He is heir to Sir Burnham Brooks of Perton, and no end of land.'

'The land may make him a swell, but not the baronetcy. Society feels to a baronet just as the Irish recruit felt to the gorgeous lacquey—it doesn't know

whether he's "a sarvin' man or a gineral."

'Of all contradictory, contumacious——'

'I know I'm out of sorts, old fellow,' interrupted Herries, floridly, throwing away the smoked-out end of his cigar; 'but the truth is, I'm hit—never was hit before, and I want you to back me up.'

'Herries,' said Felix, almost sternly, 'do you think you are the kind of man to make a woman happy?'

'If I love her, and she loves me, won't that be happiness, as you call it?' He spoke pettishly.

'Herries, I've been told that your mother's marriage was a love one. I shouldn't like my sister'—he flushed in half shame, half pride at the sound of the word—'to have a fate like hers.'

'That's my difficulty,' replied Herries, with obtuse selfishness. 'My mother won't help me, I know, though she doesn't think I'm as bad as my—well, she has hopes of *me*,'
he laughed—'and if I could only get her to

entertain the notion that Wi—that your sis—well, hang it, that a good woman would reform me, she'd maybe give me a leg up, or, at any rate, keep Brooks out of the running. A fair field and—just a little favour is all I want. Besides, I think your sister is just the sort of girl to keep a man in hand once she's landed him, and I'm more affectionate than you think, Felix.'

Felix did not reply on the instant. There was a troubled shade on his open brow, and a wistful look in his eye. At last he said, speaking slowly,

'Even if I could help you, Herries, I should not be able. I'm going into the army at once, and—for reasons I need not enter into—I'm not to visit at your mother's while my—my sister is there. So don't let us discuss the matter any more.'

'Is Brooks going with you?' asked Herries, nettled at his friend's unresponsive manner and guarded answer.

'Brooks is going into Parliament.'

And then Felix rang the bell, and ordered his horse.

'I must have a gallop,' he said ; 'my head feels full of bees.'

Herries strolled across the fields in the direction of the Lodge.

Two days later, Mrs. Gilchrist, having returned in the interim, Wiggles had finished her preparations for vacating the Lodge ; but, with a somewhat unreasonable pertinacity, she declined to relieve herself of her obligations as its tenant, having made Mrs. Biles fully understand that she intended to hold the tenement until her year should be up. With a lingering feeling of what could not be hopeful and yet was not despairing attachment to the locality, and a melancholy pleasure in the thought that there was still a spot among the well-remembered scenes of her brief wedded life where she had a right to dwell if so she listed, Mrs. Elmore acquiesced gladly in her daughter's decision, so Mrs. Biles resisted no longer ; she had

never found it of much use resisting Wiggles, whose decisions on even trivial matters were not easily set aside.

Daniel had been despatched in charge of Friar Tuck, accompanied by Leah and Rab, and the trio were to be met at the Paddington Station, in London, by Wiggles' coachman, to whom that young lady had never been any other personality but Miss Dewar, Mrs. Gilchrist's cousin. Who she was in reality had not yet reached Daniel's ear, which was fortunate, considering the need of his services at this juncture, startling intelligence having usually a confusing effect on his comprehension, and a subversive influence on the ordering of his ideas. And here it may be incidentally mentioned that Daniel never quite took in Wiggles' multiplication of *aliases*--to the end of the chapter she would always be to him 'Miss Maggie,' the most appropriate, to his taking, of her names, because the one adopted by his own mistress, Mrs. Biles. This was fortunate, as

it led to no complication in his rendering up his charges to Wiggles' coachman. This he did with a vainly repressed burst of tears, and a sob which seemed to threaten a howl.

He stood at the pony's head stroking its nose till the coachman, Johnson, taking the reins, had seated himself in the fragile basket; then it was that the sluices gave way, and the gentle-hearted rustic made his lament. Obedient to Johnson's orders, he stood aside, a knuckle in each eye, regardless of the curious loungers, unheeding of Rab's and Leah's consolatory yelps.

'Oo-o-o,' he sobbed, "'ees 'ad got to know me, 'ee's 'ad ; 'ee'd foller me to the trough, 'ee would, an' wait like a Christian till I'd filled it. Oo, oo ! 'ee would. 'Ee knowed when I was a-eatin' of my vittels, an' 'ee allus 'ad a bit. Dick 'ee couldn't 'old a candle to 'im noaways—oo, oo, oo ! I'd chuck up my place if you'll take me, master. I'm rare 'andy 'bout stables an' barns, as missus 'ud tell ees.'

But a carriage with a spirited pair of quickly-driven horses at that instant dashed up, putting a stop to poor Dick's uncouth lamentations, and sending Friar Tuck off with a bound, before Johnson, whose compassion and sympathy were on the point of finding consolatory expression, could utter a word. The rattle of the wheels and clatter of the swift-flying hoofs on the stone-way effectually drowned Daniel's valedictory howl; he stood one minute as if stupefied, saw Leah, and Rab well up beside her, disappear round the corner, and then, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, proceeded to the refreshment-bar to drown his sorrows in the bowl.

The preparations for leaving the Lodge were all complete, and in the evening Mrs. Gilchrist and Wiggles were to take their departure for town. It was arranged that Joe, with his sister Winnie, should remain in care of the house. At first Joe had positively refused the charge, if it involved his

sleeping on the premises. Suddenly, however, and without stating the reason of his change of mind, he informed Wiggles that he had thought the matter over, and had altered his mind—to Wiggles' great relief. The days were short now, and this, their last in the little nest in which they had spent such a strange eventful autumn-tide, had been gloomy as if with tears that could not fall. A light breeze had, however, sprung up as the sun wore to the west, the mists gradually melted, and a chill clearness revealed the pale blue of the sky, across which, at intervals, sluggish grey vapours rolled to join the heavy battalions of dark clouds encamped along the horizon, threatening battle on the morrow.

Wiggles had gone to the Meadows with Meg in a basket, to see that sensitive sybarite installed in her new quarters, which were to be made alluring by the free use of valerian and votive offerings of cream and fish. Mrs. Elmore, sad at heart, wrapped

a shawl round her, and strolled into the large field beyond, where but a few weeks ago Wiggles had gathered the doubtful mushrooms.

In the centre, on a knoll, stood a sheep-cote surrounded by some trees spare in growth, and nearly leafless now. From this elevation could be seen on a clear day the far-lying woods of Cartmel, even the blue smoke curling upwards from the house when the atmosphere was light. To-day only the dark belt of trees was visible, and, so black was the horizon beyond, it could hardly be said where the dense clouds began. Standing within the covert of the little copse, and leaning against the door of the sheep-cote, Claire stood. She had thrown back the shawl from her head. Her hands were crossed on her breast, and her large, wistful eyes, too sad for tears, were fixed on the spot where—well she knew—stood, deserted and lonely, the still beloved home of her early married years.

She felt, if there be truth in the supernatural, as a disembodied spirit must feel, doomed to wander, unfelt, unseen, unknown, the haunts of its human being, vainly yearning for one hour of sentient touch, of eye to eye and heart to heart. Not more impassable to it the icy barrier of death than to Claire Elmore the living barrier of the life to which hers had been one long vicarious sacrifice, a living death.

She stood with her back to the Lodge; the breeze blew from her. She did not hear a quiet, slow tread on the path across the grass, gradually nearing the shrouded knoll. So, startled, she turned at the sound of a stick snapped across, to see it flung in the distance before her. It was Joe Bracks who had taken this means to attract her attention, without presenting himself before her.

‘ You startled me, Joe,’ she said, hastily, drawing the covering over her head again, with the instinct, never dormant, of self-concealment.

'I was a-whistlin', too,' he said, apologetically, 'but the wind was to me;' and then he made a sudden step forward, placed himself in front of her, and reverently uncovered.

She looked at him, half scared, half fascinated, raising her hand to her heart, as if to ward off a hurt.

Joe lifted his eyes to her with a deprecating pathos, that, while it made her pulses beat with a timid prescience, yet took the sting from dread. For the space of seconds, as we count time, of years, as memory reckons, they then looked at each other. It was Claire who spoke first.

'Joe,' she said, and she held out her hand.

He took it in his, brown and hard with labour, and, still uncovered, bent over it with a low reverence.

'Put on your hat, Joe, the wind is cold.'

The words were common-place, the voice was constrained.

He obeyed.

' You knew me from the first,' she said ; for Joe was slow of expression, and she had waited for him to speak in vain.

' Yes, ma'am. I'm a wonderful hand at faces, most like a sheep-dog nor anything, but I would ha' been queer and blind to ha' forgotten you.'

Joe was making a valiant effort to keep his vernacular in check, but his voice was hardly as steady as usual, nor as gruff.

' It is eighteen years, Joe.'

' Years ain't got nothing to do with it, ma'am, the mem'ry 'as, the heart 'as, the eye 'as ; but you might ha' trusted me—not but what I'm agin clack,' he added, hurriedly ; ' an', mayhap, I'd think to mysel' as you didn't know as I knowed about it ; but I'd a bit note to-day'—he took a letter from the inside of the lining of his hat, and handed it to Mrs. Elmore, who held it unopened, waiting till he should have finished speaking. ' An' it was it as determined

me to break in on your 'nonymous.' He stopped to recover his colloquial equilibrium, slightly unbalanced by his use of unfamiliar words.

Mrs. Elmore opened the letter. She knew the writing. It was General Horseman's.

'Perhaps you'd read it aloud, ma'am,' said Joe.

She did so. It ran :

'JOE BRACKS,

'You'll please to make a removal from the Lodge to the *Yard*. If you want help, I can manage a day. It must not be *where it has no right to be*. So you must manage elsewhere. He'll be easier when it's done. Let me hear from you.

'Yours,

'G. HORSEMAN.'

She held out the note, shaking her head in token that she did not fully understand its drift.

'So I thought,' said Joe, supposing she

meant dissent. ‘If you’d sleep at the Meadows to-night with Miss Maggie, as I’d manage it handy, and not trouble the captain, or general, as he’s called now. There’s a grave as was dug agin the north wall, ’tother side altogether from the Cartmel vault. It was dug, a week gone now, for Simon Pipesses’ son, as were a rare prize-fighter, and died ov’sumption ten days back ; but some one—they do say as ’twas that meddlin’ Mistress Friar—presented a m’orial’ (memorial) ‘like to the bishop, as said he’d never bin baptised, an’ the fun’ral was stopped. Dr. Norris—he’s a rare Christian —don’t object to prize-fightin’ no more nor St. Paul, who hisself, as he ses, fought with beasteses too, nor doesn’t take no particular count of the baptismal register.’ Joe paused a rallying second. ‘So Dr. Norris ’ad to take off his surplice, and they took ‘im—that is young Simon Pipesses—cross country out of the diocese, an’ gave him Christian ’terment in a seminary. So that’s, ma’am,

how there's a grave handy. It bees eight feet deep, an' I'll lay the coffin in it, and cover it a foot over, an' Giles—the old sexton, you know—he won't be no wiser when he comes to fill in the hole.'

Claire understood now. With an undefined fear, she asked,

'Where did you bury her, Joe ?'

'Thought you knowed, ma'am, 'twere inside the Lodge.'

Claire became pale as death.

'How horrible !' she gasped. 'How could you let me be there ?'

'Thought you knowed,' repeated Joe, apologetically ; then, again uncovering, he said, rapidly—' Ma'am, dear, things are softer to me like now. I feels like forgiving her her trespasses, as I hope mine will be the same, and 'twere mortal 'ard to forgive 'er as died a-playin' of me false, as trusted 'er an' loved 'er, an' she not alive to say, "Joe, I'm sorry ;" but the squire, he's livin', ma'am, an' it's easier to forgive too

much love as too little. 'Ee never wronged you, ma'am, only in thought like, as was pisoned by that old varmint of a mother—an' no offence where none's meant, ma'am—and the sly ways of her as was a Jezebel in heart with yer scents and Injin shawls. The squire 'ee's living still, an' 'ee's loving as ever, still, strive as 'ard as he will; no use, I ses, fightin' agin the stream. You might forgive him now, ma'am, an' take that awful load off his mind.'

'Forgive him, Joe!' she cried, clasping her hands and raising them aloft—'there is no need of forgiveness when there is no anger; only for a little while my pride was hurt and my love wounded that he could believe it possible I could ever sink so low, and then my whole heart went out to him with oh, such pity! for I knew that remorse would come, and he could not cease to love me. But, Joe, had I undeceived him, he would have given himself up to justice, and died a felon's death. He would not have

borne the stain of innocent blood on his soul.'

'Innocent!' said Joe, fiercely, forgetting his forgiving mood—'it war righteous blood, it war, an' there's not a jury as was ever pannelled but 'ud say the same.'

'Hush!' said Mrs. Elmore, laying her hand on his arm, 'it is only the law that can take blood, innocent or guilty. Her sins to you God will judge; they were not even of the kind that all men condemn. But what your old master was then, eighteen years ago, Joe—impetuous, generous, brave, noble—so he is now. If once he knew what he had done, he would court the death from which my forbearance alone saves him.'

There was silence for a minute, broken once or twice by a choking noise in Joe's throat. He did not lift his eyes when he spoke; it was growing dusk, and Mrs. Elmore saw that he held down his face to hide the falling of the heavy drops on his

furrowed cheek, and this is what he said, with not inapt inconsequence,

'The noble army of martyrs praise Thee, amen !' after which devotional tribute, he went on : 'Then, there's no'at more to say 'bout that, an' more's the pity. It's not an ill deed in 'tself as is all the harm ; it's—it's breeden power, so to put it. Seems to me, tho' I've no learnin', as the world gets more ill out of the bad nor good out of the good.' Then, changing to matters-of-fact, he added—'Mrs. Biles she'll be glad to have you ; she's been rare uneasy since that gallows-thief of a husband of hers 'as turned up agin and threatened Miss Maggie.'

Joe had to explain. Claire had not heard of her daughter's peril. He did so in few words, winding up with—

'I've sat up o' nights in the outhouse, case he'd be up to mischief—not as there was much fears as long as the dogs was there, but they're gone now.'

Mrs. Elmore covered her face with her

hands during Joe's graphic but rapid recital ; it was some time before she could speak, and then her words were agitated.

'Joe, I wish we could leave to-night.
Mrs. Biles ought to be protected.'

'Oh ! no fears, ma'am, 'ee's a cowardly ruffian, 'ee is ; she could put him in jail for the onnatural turn of 'ees life, she could ; an' 'ee's no mind to prison fare. Ee's a born lawyer, too, took 'er with his tongue as was buttered on both sides, not a word of truth 'ud stick to it ; a rare hand at races, namin' the winner, an' playin' of Black Sammy—not a thing 'ee couldn't turn 'ees hand to, from the 'cordian' (accordian) 'to skittles, an' billiards, too, as the butler at Cartmel knowed to 'ees cost—an' now 'ee's tuk to the road ; a desperate Jonas he, as ever above-board crews cast out.'

Just then, from the direction of the Lodge, came a clear, sweet voice, singing the refrain of an old Jacobite song,

'Ha cheen fomm, fomm, fomm,
Ha cheen fomm, fomm, fomm,
Ha cheen fomm, fomm, fomm,
Ha cheen fomm eri.'

'It's miss as is come back,' said Joe ; and Claire, wrapping her shawl closely round her, turned her steps homeward.

The rooks were flying wildly in twos and threes, the sheep were gathered in clusters under the lea of the thick-set hedge, withered leaves were whirled hither and thither, and from a distant farm came the wild screech of pea-fowl ; not a solitary rabbit showed where usually scores disported themselves along the steep bank beneath the hedge ; and birds, small and great, flitted into shelter in low standing bushes and ivy-clad pollards.

'There'll be a storm,' said Joe, as if not displeased ; his emotions, like the elements, were at issue with quietude.

'A sad night's work for you, Joe,' said Claire, pitifully.

'Better as it is, ma'am, there'll be no one about.'

Had he looked back as he uttered these words, he might have seen the door of the sheep-cote cautiously opened, and a slouching figure issue and take its stand beside a tree with the evident purpose of reconnoitring ; but Joe held on his way stolidly, and as they neared the end of the field, the voice took up its lay again, and sang in strange congruity to circumstance,

‘Now on the barren heath they lie,
Their funeral dirge the eagles cry ;
The lonely cairn is o'er the men
Wha fought and died for Charlie.’
‘Ha cheen fomm——’

It was with a visible shudder Mrs. Elmore forced herself to re-enter the Lodge. Wiggins, nothing loath, now her family were dispersed, fell-in with her mother's plan of sleeping at the Meadows, and, as the night promised to close-in soon with storm and rain, they set off together with Daniel, who had returned, carrying needful things for their use.

By ten o'clock the wind had risen, and

blew in fitful gusts, now screaming through the rocking elms, now moaning down the narrow chimneys, dashing the leafless creeper against the lattice-pane, anon fiercely dragging it across the glass, as if demanding entrance at the behest of Might. The doors, imperfectly fitted, shook in their frames, as in obstinate but timorous defiance, and the pitiless rain found entrance beneath. A night of wild onslaught and rallying—not a pitched battle, but fierce skirmishing, ‘the nations’ airy navies grappling in the centre blue.’

Joe worked on. He had rigged a pulley from the substantial beam overhead, from which now hung a rope ready for service. Two hours, without intermission, he worked with pick and shovel. At last, after many failures, he succeeded in passing underneath the long, wooden box he had laid bare, two strong ropes. These he connected with the one pendant from the pulley, and, with apparent ease, brought the box to the surface, and dragged it out-

side the *débris* on to the floor beyond.

He then rested awhile from his labour. Standing between the box and its vacated tenement, he leant on his shovel, his rough-hewn, furrowed face, working with ill-repressed emotion, his iron-grey locks, damp with moisture from his brow, straggling over his keen, troubled eyes, and his beard covered with morsels of half-dried clay. The fire on the hearth had burnt itself to ashes ; now and again a down blast from the chimney would scatter them right and left. A lantern, fastened to the dresser, and a paraffin-lamp above the mantel-piece, gave uncertain light, brought principally to bear on the scene of operations.

Joe stood thus for the space of many minutes—a storm wild as the fray raging within his breast. He, in that little time, lived again his rustic idyll, bore again its anguish, its tragedy. He was at the church gate in his Sunday best, a heavy-odoured gilly-flower in his coat-front, his auburn

locks brushed up from his sunburnt, honest face, full of intelligence and character. A little shame-faced, perhaps, trying to deaden his ear to the sly pokes of jests from less favoured lads, to whom Annie Pierce, lady's-maid at Cartmel, was a divinity to be worshipped from afar. She came mincing down the path, a tall girl with a well-poised head, fair hair, and soft complexion, features sharp and small, with a look of vanity and falsehood in her restless blue eyes. They walked across the fields together; she took his gilly-flower and gave in exchange a kiss. It is a bright summer day, and there is sunshine, too, in Joe's heart.

The summer has come round again, and the sun is bright as ever; but Joe's heart is dark. He is at the church-gate again, his locks scarcely so smoothly brushed, and trouble in his hungry-looking eyes. The stirring voluntary from the organ seems to pursue the scattering congregation with notes of warning and cheer.

She comes down the path again, mincing as before. Her face is less fair, and her eyes look eager and cold. He makes one uncertain step forward and proffers a pretty bunch of forget-me-nots. She looks at her delicate kid gloves—ill-gotten gift, he knew—and rejects his offering.

They do not walk across the fields together, she claims a seat behind in the Cartmel carriage, and the gaping yokels poke awkward fun at his discomfited aspect.

A few weeks later he stands in the summer moonlight, sheltered from view by a great elm. In his hands is a gun at full cock. There is a devil in his heart and murder in his eyes. In a little while she comes, not mincing now, but stealing—like a marauding cat, he thought—quickly across the velvety sward, looking to right and left, and behind. He waits his time, his face white as the pale rays resting on the grassy leaves, his teeth clenched. She flits past him, heavily scented with perfume that

never yet breathed from flower. He hears a tread in the distance, and the moonlight shows two figures—they stop and shelter beside a hedge. He leaves his gun against the elm and conceals himself behind a bush. As if uncertain of her trysting-place, she looks back, and stands out by a rich flowering azalea in anxious quest for some one.

Another minute, and a low whistle cuts through his heart. He rises to regain his gun; but, before he can move one step, he sees it seized—a voice remonstrates—

‘For —— sake, Elmore, take care what you do !’

He is bewildered. Then she flings her arms round the neck of a tall figure—he springs from his covert—the figure disappears—flies—a shot cuts the air by his cheek—and she falls. The gun is dashed to the ground—he is alone with the dead.

It is near dawn now. He is where he stands to-night; there is a gaping hole, too, but a stranger is by his side. Reverently

and quietly they sepulchre in unholy ground
his dead love, his heart has no sorrow—
he feels cruel. To-night, a strange softness
that is not grief, only a tender pity, only a
wish that she could hear him say, as now
he does, reverently bowing his head, ‘I
forgive thee, Annie; God forgive thee, too.’

Then, from out an unfathomable and
mysterious receptacle somewhere in the
region of his heart, he unwraps by tedious
process a somewhat thin bit of metal—it is
a half-sixpence, and tells its own simple tale
of plighted and faithless troth.

‘And I give thee back thy gift, dear,’ he
says, forcing the bit of thin silver through a
slit in the box. ‘Thou wilt lie beside holy
rood in the old church where thee pranked
so fair, an’ mebbe—for God’s more merciful
nor man—if thee’s purging is done, thee’ll
not be so far behind mysen when my time’s
up.’

He stopped with a start and listened.

‘Twere but the blast,’ he said; and then

he repeated the Lord's Prayer, and said the blessing, and returned to his gruesome task of sepulture.

It was some time, and tedious work, ere he had the box on the truck in readiness outside, and was fairly underway for the churchyard. He had not far to go, but, just as he set his face to the road, the blast rose to a fury, and, to retain his balance, he had to throw his arms round the box. Thus he lay for full five minutes, then the wind suddenly lulled, and the rain descended in torrents. Trusting to the fitful gleams of moonlight through the swift driving clouds, he plodded slowly on his way, and reached the churchyard-gate, which was open, in safety. The water lay deep in the open grave, the box sank beneath its surface. Soon the earth was shovelled in, till every vestige was concealed. Even then the depth looked formidable, and Joe had no uneasy fear of discovery. The state of the ground from the devastating storm

was in his favour, and he knew the grave would be filled in on the morrow hurriedly.

Infinitely relieved, he hastened back through the deluged roads. As he closed the churchyard-gate, the moon suddenly broke, as it were from prison, and flooded the old church tower with light, flinging weird shadows of leafless branches on the grassy mounds, and shining full on the open grave of the murdered girl.

Joe could have better borne the pitchy darkness. He quickened his pace, ploughing through ruts, and stumbling over branches. As he neared the Lodge once more, he fancied he saw a light move, but quieting what he called his ‘megrims’ with ‘it be’s the wind; ’twould scour a gravel pit,’ he brought in his barrow and tools, and fastened the door.

It was the work of only half an hour to fill up the hole in the hearth, and replace the stone, but it was dawn before he had restored the floor to its previous state of

cleanliness, and had obliterated the other traces of his night's ghastly work. Before he proceeded to cleanse his mud-laden person, he went to the little larder for refreshment. To his surprise and slow-growing horror, he at once perceived that a raid had been made in his absence—there was nothing left.

CHAPTER VI.

'Thy heart—*thy* heart !
I wake, and sigh, and sleep, or dream till day
Of the truth that gold can never buy—
Of the baubles that it may.'

THE lordly home of the Caldermans did not impress Wiggles with awe. Perhaps she was not endowed with much reverence for outward circumstance : it was, at any rate, certain that she was never oppressed by grandeur. With a love for simplicity, she had yet a keen sense of artistic beauty, and she felt that the grand hall of Monkswood Castle had been planned more with a view to strike the beholder with wonder and admiration, than as a key-note of harmony to a grand symphony. Lady Calderman's

own footman had been sent to receive her young guest. On his countenance supreme disgust was expressed ; in his stiff and haughty pose, contemptuous pity.

He had been required to hold the glass bowl with Tad and Pole, and Culton, Wiggles' maid, had at the same moment directed the porter to group round him the rest of the menagerie, while the luggage was being piled on the vehicle, a private omnibus, and until her mistress had been installed therein.

Thus standing, statue-like, in servile martyrdom, he was the subject of sundry offensive jokes, and questions not requiring answers, from the two porters of the station, and of small but stinging witticisms from the one telegraph-boy, and a boy waiting in hopes of a carpet-bag to carry to its destination. By these forward persons, he was styled Jeames. Wiggles held the bullfinch's little travelling cage in her hand. Culton had charge of Gog and Magog, who were invisible. Lingo, from within her

green-baize shroud, performed first a steam-whistle, then a bar of the ‘Quaker’s Wife,’ after which she desired everyone ‘to go to the devil;’ and then, her system being relieved, she wound up with a peal of satanic laughter.

There had been a debateable moment as to Rab and Leah, but they settled the matter by following their mistress into the omnibus, and no one seemed disposed to disturb them. So it happened that the menagerie arrived entire. Lady Calderman had given orders that she was to be informed when Wiggles arrived. She was therefore in the hall almost as soon as the latter reached it, holding Bob’s cage in her hand. Culton remained in the omnibus, in charge of the rest of the live stock and luggage, and with them was conveyed to the courtyard, from which she was shown to Wiggles’ quarters, where she placed her charges in safety. Leah was taken to the stable-yard, greatly to her own disgust; but, recognising Friar

Tuck, she majestically consented to subside into quietude.

A hutch at the foot of the balcony stairs from Wiggles' boudoir, ending in an exquisite little garden, with a rosary that made an arbour in the centre, received Rab, who, quite alive to the dignity of his position as guardian and trusted companion to his beloved mistress, took possession as a matter of course. He only walked round it once, betrayed scarcely any curiosity, sniffed the air, then lowered his scrubby tail, entered, and lay down. The solemn butler, who had received Wiggles with the air of taking-over a prisoner, was the sympathising recipient of the mortified footman's wrongs ; it was agreed between them that a disturbing element had been added to the strictly conventional, if somewhat *triste*, establishment.

'She oughter to have brought a keeper, she oughter,' said the latter ; 'her maid, Miss Culton's her name, ain't up to much, or she wouldn't ha' rode inside with such

cattle. I hates revolutionising officials, I does.'

'She's a 'centric, I take it,' replied Mr. Marshlem, 'and a high-stepper, too, or I'm out—meaning Miss Elmore, of course; her young woman will soon pick up her status here;' and Mr. Marshlem cut the evening papers which had come by the train, and crossed his legs in his easy chair for a digest of the latest news.

After a warm, welcoming embrace, passively borne by Wiggles, Lady Calderman took her young guest's hand and led her to the rooms prepared for her special use.

'You shall see your family safe first, Maggie, and then we'll adjourn to my boudoir and have tea. I have made very little change since Claire's day,' she added, noticing the flush of pleasurable surprise on Wiggles' face as they entered the elegant and yet simple rooms prepared for her use.

A small boudoir, dressed in new chintz, gay with humming-birds and butterflies,

made home-like with pretty old china, books, and pictures, and delicate marqueterie furniture, led into a good-sized bedroom and dressing-room beyond, the same chintz draping all.

‘Claire had satin drapery,’ said Lady Calderman, ‘but it looked faded, and I thought chintz prettier.’

‘Oh, Lady Calderman, it is lovely!—how I wish Mother-nurse could see it all!’ And then, as if obeying a sudden impulse, Wiggle threw her arms round her god-mother’s neck and kissed her thanks.

‘And I am quite close,’ said Lady Calderman, two bright drops on her cheeks; ‘my bed-room is exactly opposite your boudoir. This corridor is devoted to single sleeping-rooms only. The principal guest-chambers are at the other side of the castle. This is your very own sanctum, and even I shall never seek admittance when you wish to be alone; and one word, Maggie darling, although I wish you to know my friends,

and to appear among the guests here, remember you are at perfect liberty to come and go as you please. You may not always care for society ; you may not like some of the people you meet here, for we live much in the world, so look on this as your refuge, and try to feel as free as I would have you.'

'It will be a little time before I settle down,' answered Wiggles, a cloud in her sweet eyes ; her heart yearned for her mother. 'I shall miss Mother-nurse so, but I know in a little while things will seem more natural, and then I'm sure I—I'll love you.'

Wiggles was not given to gush. She rarely expressed her affection in words, and the warm feeling to which she had given unwonted utterance seemed to rebound on her ; her cheeks were covered with blushes, and she turned brusquely aside to hide her confusion. Lady Calderman had great tact. Instinctively she read the girl's mood, and began to understand somewhat of her rare,

sensitive, and reticent nature, and to catch a glimpse, perhaps, of the exquisite tenderness that lay beneath the somewhat chilly surface. Poor woman, her whole heart, stinted of its meed of love, went out to greet the timid indication of a sweet compensation.

They then adjourned to her boudoir, a more pretentious room than the sunny retreat provided for her guest. There tea awaited them. Wiggles had cast aside her travelling wraps; her maid had smoothed her attire, and reduced some stray tresses to order, and had placed a spray of freshly-gathered roses, late autumn blooms, in her breast; she looked fresh and unruffled, a something in consonance with the refined atmosphere around her, a fitting part of a beautiful and harmonious whole. There was no self-consciousness about Wiggles, utterly natural she fell into her place with a graceful ease, and a dignified assumption of recognised station.

A semi-grand pianoforte lay open, a

harp by its side. Loose music indicated some recent performance.

‘Only favoured guests come here,’ said Lady Calderman. ‘Trixie Power is a splendid harpist ; we were practising a duet this afternoon.’ As she spoke she touched an electric bell, and in a minute or two her footman, Lister, the supercilious functionary already mentioned, announced the lady in question, and in another minute two others, a Mrs. Cashel and a Miss Pastron, followed by two gentlemen, one Herries Heron, the other Lord Fantum, a somewhat horsey-looking young man, with, however, a kindly expression of countenance, and a quiet bearing. To these Wiggles was presented with just a little *empressement*.

‘My son, you already know,’ said Lady Calderman.

The young man had the grace to blush as he held out his hand with an air of uncertainty. He was evidently not sure of a friendly reception. Wiggles, with the faint-

est shade of hesitation, just touched the offered palm, bowed gravely, and then, with a graceful and unembarrassed acknowledgment of the salutation of the rest of the company, she sat down beside a small, low table, and busied herself with her tea.

There had been intense curiosity to see the once repudiated daughter of Mr. Elmore of Cartmel, whose story knew a hundred variations. It was, however, enough for society, for ever on the watch for sensation, that there was a mystery—that circumstance alone would have sufficed to make the most ordinary individual an object of interest; but, when it hung over youth, beauty, and fortune, the case was *piquante* in the extreme. Sympathy and admiration would reject or condone suspicious details, as warmly as envy and malice would receive and circulate them. Wiggles was on her trial; but she knew it not, or, if in part knowing, she was indifferent, perhaps contemptuous. Wiggles was by nature not a little intolerant.

Herries, with a tiny cup of *café noir*, drew a chair to her side. He was trying hard to be at his ease ; but he was not endowed with tact, and a slight swagger was all he achieved. He felt, before he lifted his bold eyes to the young girl's face, the same indescribable diffidence—to call it by no stronger name—in her presence, which he had felt before her by the little wicket-gate of the Lodge.

'By Jove !' he said to himself the same evening, over a post-prandial cigar—' by Jove ! but she takes it out of a fellow, and yet she's not half the woman Lady Trixie is. *She* could command a regiment—splendid figure-head, high-lipped scorn, dashing eyes—and yet I am never at a loss for a word with her. She does not impress me—it's all bunkum—but this Wiggles, she assumes nothing, she's just what she is, and that's the loveliest, rarest, sweetest, coldest, most tantalising, haughty, mocking *diableresse* that ever made a man surrender his colours without

even a shot in the air; *veni vidi vici*, and I believe she hates me—no, not *hates*—I'd have a little hope, then—but despises me.'

He threw away his half-consumed cigar with a muttered oath.

'However, my Lady will help me.'

A doubt drew forth another oath.

'Well, I'll turn over a new leaf, and we'll see; she's not unnatural, and, if she'll only look on the matter from a guardian-angel point of view, I shall gain the day—and, by Jove, I do believe I'd cave in to the guardian angel. Just at this moment I feel equal to anything, to scratching bets for the Derby, cutting the turf, joining the Young Men's Christian Association, and stumping the country in the ranks of the Blue Ribbon Army.' He lit another cigar, smoked it reflectively, sadly. 'And—and the deuce is in it, but I believe the fit would last; when women of her sort land a big fish, they never let it slip over the banks again.'

Then, with this unwonted diffidence holding him like an invisible net, he said,

‘What am I to call you?’

‘What everyone else does,’ she answered, quietly.

‘And that is?’

‘Miss Elmore.’

‘Wiggles is so *piquante*.’

She made no answer.

Herries began to flounder.

‘Poor Mrs. Friar, when she heard you were not Wiggles——’

‘But I am Wiggles.’

‘Well—ah! well, not Wiggles to her.
She—ah——’

‘Yes, Mr. Heron, she——’

‘She—ah! pulled up, changed her cue,
caved in. Ah——’

‘All in one—remarkable combination of metaphors.’

‘Well—dash it, she did as I did, felt ashamed of herself, and made, as I want to make, the *amende honorable*.’

There was a saving grace of sincerity in this announcement. Wiggles felt it; she was generous. For Lady Calderman's sake, she took the proffered olive-branch, and said, very quietly, but kindly,

'To err is *human*, to *repent divine*.'

And thus a tacit peace was signed.

'And, Miss Elmore, I hope you will be happy here,' he added, with a voice not over-steady. 'You know Felix and I are old chums.'

She inclined her head with a grave smile, but did not answer.

'Herries,' said Lady Calderman, 'would you gather up those loose leaves for me? Lady Trixie is going to sing.'

With a laggard air, Herries obeyed.

'What are you going to sing?' he asked, as the young lady took her seat at the harp.
'Shall I bring you your music?'

'No necessity,' she said, curtly, throwing up her loose sleeves, and sweeping her bared and splendidly moulded arms round the

instrument. ‘It’s an old ditty we all know — “*Fascination*,”’ and, as she struck the opening chords, she suddenly flashed from her great, glowing, languishing orbs, a look into Herries’ bold, dark eyes that spoke reproach, jealousy, anger, and love.

With a faint vision of an understanding smile, he returned the look with one that was meant to express admiration, assurance, a covert confidence, and responding love ; and Lady Trixie sang as rarely she sang, with the victor ring of triumph, the commanding note of a dominating passion. The effect on all present was magnetic. Every eye was turned on the singer, every breath was held ; a feather might have been heard eddying its way to the ground. Wiggles listened entranced and repelled in one. Her senses were enthralled, her soul was in revolt. Then silence fell ; and, pale as the drooping lily that lay on her rather liberally displayed bosom, the singer rose and took a seat beside Wiggles. The effect of her

song quickly subsided: it had stirred no depths save in one bosom, and that at all times her faintest word reached—Lord Fantum's, the well-known John Roberts of the turf, a man of ruined fortunes, but scrupulous honour.

'Do you sing, Miss Elmore?' asked Lady Trixie, with a slightly patronising air.

'Oh! yes,' was the reply, as if given to 'Do you breathe?'

'Do follow up my good example, then.'

'Oh! I think not just yet,' said Wiggles, simply. 'Everything is new to me; one has to be in accord with things to sing one's best. My voice has not the range yours has.'

'Do you sing operatic music?' this a little superciliously.

'Yes; but my tastes are simple. I love ballads.'

'Perhaps you haven't your music?' said Lady Trixie, still more patronisingly.

'No, not here; but I am pretty independent of my music. I always learn my songs by heart.'

'The best way to sing *to* the heart; but you must pipe to us. You have a singing face. I'll accompany you, if you like.'

Then, without waiting for an answer, Lady Trixie turned to Lady Calderman, and asked her, with a pretty imperiousness, to bid her pretty little shy bird tune up.

'No, dear Trixie,' answered Lady Calderman, 'Miss Elmore only arrived this afternoon—another time.'

'Ah! you are wise, I daresay. But, somehow, I'm always in tune. Mine's a rough and ready organ.'

Something in this speech put Wiggles on her mettle. She had conceived a nascent dislike to the beautiful, bold girl. By intuition she felt they were inimical to each other, and she imagined that she perceived a *soupçon* of aggressiveness in the latter's manner to her.

'I'll sing with pleasure,' she said, very quietly, addressing Lady Calderman, at the same time rising; and, before anyone could

say a word or offer help, she was seated at the harp, and was carolling with a pathos that brought tears to Lady Calderman's eyes, made, metaphorically, the Lady Trixie 'pause in her flight,' and Herries Heron 'drop down at her feet.' And this is what she sang,

‘A wee bird cam’ to oor ha’ door,
An’ warbled late an’ airly,
An’ aye the o’ercome o’ its sang
Was “Wae’s me for Prince Charlie.”’

It was a strange song to choose. But Lady Calderman understood the yearning thought that prompted it. It woke other memories, too—the voice, the very face conjured up the past. She could have wept.

To cover her agitation, she rose quickly as the last note of the refrain died away in exquisite melody, and, putting her hand on Wiggles' shoulder, she said, as if remonstrating,

‘Now, dear, a lively one, please, something *couleur de rose*, to take us out of the blues.’

The audience gave a sigh. They seemed spell-bound. Wiggles looked up. Her eyes were lustrous, but sad, and, obedient to her hostess's demand, she struck some stirring chords, threw up her throat, which was 'like the swan,' and sang, with ringing clearness,

'All the Blue Bonnets are over the border.'

As she struck the last chord, Lord Calderman came in, not a little to the surprise of all present. Not twice in the year did he pay a visit to his wife's own peculiar sanctum, and perhaps no one was now more surprised than herself. She flushed, and then grew pale, but, with her never-failing tact, she turned to Wiggles, and said, ,

'My lord's visit is in your honour, Maggie;' and then, looking at him gravely, she added, 'Felix Elmore's daughter, my lord,' taking Wiggles' hand in hers.

'And the sweetest songstress I ever heard,' he rejoined, coming forward, and welcoming his guest with warm courtesy.

' You will make barbaric music fashionable,' said Lady Trixie, superciliously. ' Do you play the bagpipes ? '

Herries flushed angrily. He drew a chair to her side, on mischief intent. Wiggles did not vouchsafe an answer. She had begun a lively conversation with her host.

But for his rakish air, Herries Heron would have been a distinguished-looking man. He had clear, well-cut features, a soft and winning voice when he pleased, dark and piercing eyes, and a certain daring in his manner. He was tall, and broad-shouldered ; a manly-looking youth ; a splendid rider and shot, and a scientific bruiser. Of his reputation in this line he was specially proud. In no degree could he be called a lady's man, yet he was, when he condescended to be gracious, a favourite with the fair sex, and not a few sore hearts he had given in his short career, though hitherto escaping scatheless himself.

The most serious affair he had yet had

was with Lady Trixie, but Herries had plenty of cunning, and so far he was not compromised. There were contending elements of good and evil in Lady Trixie. If things went smoothly with her in the grave issues of life, she would do well—would be a loving wife, and fill her place in society faultlessly; but, if the reverse should be the case, there were capabilities in her nature of the strength of which she was herself hardly aware as yet, which might turn the fair promise of her life into a moral ruin. There could be no middle course for Trixie Power.

Carelessly, as one would wile a bird from its free bush, Herries had won her heart, and had Wiggles not appeared on the scene, he might have drifted into a spurious affection for her, and bound his fate to hers—lucklessly for both, fealty to aught but self was not in Herries Heron's nature.

‘You were in glorious voice,’ he whispered.
‘I wish you would sing some simple ballads.’

She laughed, looking at him from under her heavy lids.

‘Going in for bread and butter?’ she asked, with a taunting softness.

‘As a variety,’ he replied, in the same strain.

‘Where has she been all these years?’ she asked, looking at Wiggles, who was still chatting merrily to Lord Calderman.

‘In mid-heaven, I should say,’ he replied.

‘Isn’t she delicious?’

A great storm gathered in the girl’s heart, and lightning flashed from her eyes; but she answered, coldly,

‘Women are bad judges of each other’s flavour. I should have thought you would prefer your wine mellow.’

‘It would be wiser,’ he said; ‘new wine is more intoxicating.’

‘And you’—she turned on him, her voice trembling with passion—‘and you used to boast that you had made your head young.’

‘In certain vintages.’ He said these words slowly, insultingly.

'Do you know what Mrs. Cashel says?' she returned.

'No—something bitter, of course.'

'That "mamma" has discovered a rural confection of innocence, and offers her naughty boy the goody to make matrimony go down.'

'There are some confections would make any draught, however distasteful, sweet,' he answered, rather lamely—he was not quick at retort. Lord Fantum approached. 'But here's a victim quite ready for the dose without the goody;' and with this last rudeness he lounged carelessly away.

Lord Fantum dropped into his empty chair. It was an inopportune moment, and he would have fared badly at his inamorata's hands had Lady Calderman not called attention to the hour, at which hint the company dispersed to dress for dinner, Lady Trixie, with feminine contrariety, more in love with her nonchalant lover than ever.

Had Wiggles known it, she might not

have felt so reconciled to her year's probation as she did at the close of the day;—she had a deadly enemy in Lady Trixie Power.

The next day and the day following guests kept arriving at Monkswood Castle; then the tale was full, and slaughter among the pheasants began in all earnest. So many new faces made Wiggles a little timid at first, but she fell into her place without awkwardness, and her spirits rose with the life and movement around her. At first she was an object of interest to all, but other attractions soon divided their attention, and, almost as soon as she had begun to feel their curiosity obtrusive, it died away in the varied amusements each day presented. But not so the interest in her beauty—that was ever fresh.

In all guises she was charming; her sweet and gracious manner, yet spirited air that warned intruders off delicate ground, her merry repartees and ringing laugh, made in all a new sensation to the jaded habitués

of conventional drawing-rooms, with their stereotyped reproductions of inanity and fastness without the novelty of originality.

She might have counted her triumphs by the dozen, but she was provokingly equal in her manner to all, and seemingly as pleased with the attentions of a staid sexagenarian as with the devoted devoirs of the susceptible young squires, or more difficile prizes of the market matrimonial. And each day a budget of the day's doings, thoughts, fancies, and sayings reached Claire Elmore's solitary home. Less frequent letters came to Wiggles; by arrangement, she heard but twice in the week from her mother—the address always written in a feigned hand. And every day saw Herries Heron more hopelessly in love. He grudged the hours he had to spend trudging with the sportsmen over the stubble, and was in imminent danger of losing his reputation as a crack shot. But one day he was fired with the ambition to retrieve his character. There

was to be a *battue*, of which the ladies were to be spectators from a distance.

The pheasants were driven within the range, and the eager sportsmen took up their position. Lady Trixie, falsely sweet to her rival, walked by her side a little in advance of the other ladies. They brought up on a turf^y bank void of trees or shade.

Beneath, like a scene from the days of Robin Hood, the marksmen were scattered. Then the dogs were slipped, and the beautiful and helpless prey rose in clouds, to fall bleeding and fluttering to the ground the same instant.

‘And this is sport!’ cried Wiggles, covering her face with both her hands, just as a splendid cock pheasant, wounded in the wing, tumbled at her feet. With almost a shriek of pain, she stooped and picked it up. It had been hit in the lower part of the pinion, and fluttered strongly for liberty. It was the work of a minute; she knelt, holding her captive firmly with one hand,

while with the other she gave her handkerchief to Lady Trixie, desiring her imperatively to tear it into strips. She was obeyed. Trixie seemed to have no power to resist.

'Now then,' she cried, 'a few thin short splints. There is a piece of dry wood—split it.'

Trixie did as she was told.

'Hold it so,' commanded Wiggles, and Trixie held the frightened bird as desired. Another five minutes, and the broken wing was set deftly and firmly, and the bird tenderly placed in a brooding-hutch under cover of a bush, out of the range of the *battue*—safe for the time being. Later in the day water and food were placed inside. But, when the wing had been set, Trixie rallied.

'Your humanity is illogical, Miss Elmore,' she sneered. 'You ate cold pheasant at breakfast. What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't feel, I suppose.'

'It is brutal sport,' said Wiggles, 'and

not English. It is the cruelty of it that disgusts me. As for eating pheasant, Lady Trixie, I might as well object to eating lamb, or any other animal served as food. But I shall never—no, never—witness another *battue*.'

'Ah! you should come to Hurlingham to understand the refinement of cruelty. I go there because all the world goes, but I don't like it. Mrs. Cashel says she would give anything to be allowed to enter the lists. She is a crack shot, I believe—goes out alone with her dogs, and brings a full bag home often, from hares to snipe. For myself, I dislike the sight of blood, but I can't say I have much sentiment about animals. I don't think they can feel pain as we do; still, blood is a nasty sight.'

Herries came suddenly up.

'Such a tale,' he cried; 'only missed three aims in fifty. Splendid sport, wasn't it, Miss Elmore?'

Wiggles was pale, and her sweet eyes

were dim with moisture—dimly luminous. She turned aside with a shudder.

‘Oh, don’t!’ she cried; ‘it’s just like murder. I didn’t know such things were done, and called amusements.’

Herries looked unfeignedly astonished. Then Lady Trixie narrated the incident of the wounded pheasant; she thought to cover her rival with ridicule. But she had missed her mark; she had done more, for her bullet had turned aside and hit herself.

‘I am so sorry,’ he cried, with real distress, addressing Wiggles. ‘I did not know, or I forgot, that you were not used to this sort of thing. Lady Trixie here has served her apprenticeship at Hurlingham. It must have been some bungler; I always hit home.’

‘Oh!’ she cried once more, ‘I never saw a *battue* before, and I hope never to see one again. I know a good shot is a merciful man, for a quick death is always merciful. I think I’ll go home.’

She turned as she spoke, and Trixie with her, Herries at her other side.

‘I’ll have the bird looked after,’ he said, and he was as good as his word. To Lady Trixie’s inward vexation, he tended it himself, till the wing, strong enough to dispense with the bandages, he himself took them off, and then gave the bird its liberty—Wiggles standing by his side as he did so, softer in her manner to him than she had ever been, and grateful.

Trixie, taking her cue from Herries’ mood, affected a humanity foreign to her nature. She sent a liberal subscription to the ‘Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals,’ and went out of her way to notice the dogs about the place; but Rab and Leah would none of her. They were too well bred to express their objection to the patronising gloved pats vocally, neither snarl nor growl escaped them under the evident affliction; but while Leah stood majestically still, and utterly indifferent, Rab drew his silky ears back till his glowing eyes became painfully prominent, and

lowered his scrubby tail as he sidled up to his mistress and looked her appealingly in the face.

'Ah!' thought Wiggles, 'a case of Dr. Fell.'

It very soon became evident to the distinguished company at Monkswood Castle that Felix Elmore's mysterious daughter was a young lady of a decidedly original cast. At first her fresh and unmistakably natural beauty drew forth the spontaneous admiration of the gentlemen, and the half-hearted approval of the ladies; but except in the case of one or two impulsive individuals—very green, as Lady Trixie described them—the former seemed content to worship from a safe distance. There was evidently a warning influence in the air. 'Nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles' are a deadly armoury, and in these Lady Trixie in especial was well munitioned. Herries' devotion was too well apparent—to Lord Fantum it was a source of comfort unspeakable, and Lady Trixie was, in command of

outward expression of feeling, a woman of the world.

Perhaps only the eye of a lover so thoroughly in earnest, or, as she would have said, so very far gone, could have discovered the state of her heart with regard to the young heir of Monkswood Castle. He knew it, for he had watched them together ; he felt it, for her manner to himself increased in acerbity, and he gauged its intensity by her marked animus against her rival—poor Lord Fantum ; he and the object of his idolatry had, at least, one feeling in common—jealousy.

But a man seriously in love seems to lose all sense of tact. He is for ever blundering, for ever injuring his own case, especially when his fair one is indifferent. And Lord Fantum was no exception to this rule. It was the day the wounded pheasant was to be given its liberty. Quite a little detachment, headed by Trixie, accompanied Herries and Wiggles to see the captive set free.

Wiggles was in high spirits, sparkling, happy, and slightly off her guard. As the bird—ungrateful—sped across the green sward, and sought its familiar shelter in the low undergrowth of the plantation, she turned her brilliant eyes on its deliverer, and said, with a risky approach to gush,

‘ Oh ! Mr. Heron, how can I thank you enough ?’

The look that met hers chased the colour from her cheeks. She was not angry, or she had not paled ; but she was grieved. Her heart, just at that moment, felt softer towards her brother’s friend than she had ever believed it possible it could, and she was pained at the thought of giving him pain ; but pity, in this instance, was not akin to love. She tried to laugh off her embarrassment, and cried, merrily,

‘ But I fear it will be a case of—

“ He that was spared to run away,
Was only spared for another day.” ’

‘ Miss Elmore is doubly merciful,’ cried

Lady Trixie, lightly ; ‘she first heals the wound, and then gives the victim its liberty.’

‘An example to be imitated,’ retorted Wiggles, airily. ‘Why keep an unwilling captive?’

Herries laughed outright. Trixie scowled at him ; but, before the bitter words rising to her lips could find expression, Lord Fantum fatuously whispered in her ear,

‘Freedom would be death to some victims.’

‘Then “a short shrift to them,”’ she said, disdainfully.

Not a little piqued he returned,

‘Poor Herries ! he’s really hit this time. It has been going on some time.’

‘Pardon me,’ she replied, ‘Lady Calderman told me she had only discovered her quite recently. She was some sort of cousin of her mother’s. Didn’t you see her introduce Miss Elmore to Lord Calderman the day of her arrival ?’

‘Yes. But I have it from undoubted authority that she was masquerading in

some rural nook, and Herries was her rustic spoil !

‘Where?’ she asked, imperiously.

‘Near Cartmel—Elmore’s place,’ he added.

‘She went by the name of Wiggles there—cooked her own dinner ; drove a market-cart ; set her dogs at tramps—in short, kept the country alive. But this is all between ourselves.’

‘Who told you this?’

‘A Mrs. Friar, wife of a sort of yeoman gentleman, or gentleman yeoman in that quarter. I was buying a horse in the neighbourhood, and dined at their house. She made quite a sensation there !’

‘But she is not on terms with her father. Lady Calderman told me so. So how could she be at Cartmel?’

‘Not *at* Cartmel, but near it ; in a disused Lodge somewhere, as I gathered. Mrs. Friar was vicious, so I daresay she got some rough handling somewhere. I would rather be the young lady’s friend than foe ; and so

Herries thinks, I fancy—the best fencer in the matrimonial ring toppled over by a novice.'

'No *novice*, I swear,' returned Lady Trixie. 'Mrs. Cashel says her mother was—well, what women of any repute scorn, but men—some men, do not object to. So she must have been brought up in a nice school.'

'I have not studied her too closely,' he whispered, almost apologetically. 'My eyes always follow my heart;' and he looked at Trixie imploringly.

'Do they?' she replied, innocently. 'What a fatuous idiosyncrasy! Were I you, I would sound a recall, and then right-about-face.'

'I prefer a forlorn hope,' he whispered. 'I stick to my colours.'

She laughed and sneered.

'A new version of the "Love Chase." Cupid and a *phantom*.'

'Doubly represented,' he retorted, looking at Herries, who, intent on every word falling from Wiggles' lips, walked in advance a few steps.

As the party returned, they stopped at the stables to see a promising colt of Herries'.

'Have you named it?' asked Lady Trixie.

'No,' he answered.

'Then, it is not entered for the Derby?'

'No; it is not thoroughbred.'

'Then call it Wiggles,' she said, loud enough for that young lady to hear, but, if she did, she made no sign.

'I can't,' replied Herries, coolly; 'I've named the chestnut that.'

'What! Your next year's Derby?'

'Yes.'

'Why, you said you had called it—Spell!' He laughed carelessly.

'Ah, a broken spell, you see.'

'Or broken faith—which?' she hissed; and then, jealousy and passion mastering her caution, she added, 'You challenge scrutiny—Wiggles is suggestive.'

'Lady Trixie, Miss Elmore is my mother's guest.'

'But not as Wiggles.'

‘As anything she wishes to call herself?’

‘But not as *you* would wish to call her,’ she said; and she passed on, and joined Mrs. Cashel.

‘You are pale, Trixie,’ said the latter.

Then Trixie told her story, with not a little embellishment. Mrs. Cashel was all attention. Such a choice *morceau* of scandal she had not tasted for a long time. It had a flavouring of mystery, and a delicious sprinkling of impropriety. But, even to those she called her friends, Mrs. Cashel could not restrain her jibes.

‘He has behaved shamefully,’ said Trixie. ‘He named the colt after me, “Spell,” and now, without one word of apology, he tells me he has called it Wiggles. What would you advise me to do?’

‘*Scratch her*,’ was the reply, followed by a grating laugh.

The devil was busy in Trixie Power’s heart that day.

CHAPTER VII.

'The deepest ice that ever froze
Can only o'er the surface close;
The living stream lies quick below,
And flows, and cannot cease to flow.'

THERE was lack of nothing and need of nothing in Lord Calderman's princely establishment—of nothing but ready money.

By a mutually demoralising financial arrangement, consumer and supplier sustained their commercial relations, an arrangement which had the peculiar effect of never lessening the total of the debtor column standing in the ledger of the latter against the former. The system is time-honoured, and known to the unthrifty as the 'instalment process,' payments at irregular intervals, immediately followed by renewed 'patron-

age ' to an equal amount. By this method the charges of the supplier are left virtually to his own discretion, and the necessity of retrenchment on the part of the consumer is made a far-off contingency.

Now and then a crisis occurred, tided over by the family solicitor on the one side, and occasionally an accommodating Israelite on the other. And so it came that in all the abundance representing money, money itself in the Calderman *ménage* was scarcer than in many a house of narrow means. This state of things did not smooth the angularities of my lord's temper. His extensive estates were strictly entailed, and hitherto his son had determinately refused to break the entail even of a portion. But Lord Calderman was wise—he did not press the proposal earnestly—he bided his time. Instead of trying to restrain Herries in extravagance, he encouraged him, with the intent of using the day of pressure, which he knew must come, to his own ends.

Lady Calderman had a certain income settled on her at her marriage in lieu of the prospective fortune which was to redeem some mortgages on the estate, and this income was safe. She drew it herself. Out of this my lord had more than once condescended to borrow a hundred or two, and had forgotten to pay; his wife had now found courage to refuse further loans. Herries had also been liberally helped out of the same store. At first he had had the grace to both feel and express compunction, but not latterly. There is nothing like debt for dulling the fine edge of keen feeling—nothing like the pressure of personal embarrassment for glamouring utter selfishness. And so with Herries. It seemed to him now a matter of course that his mother's purse should be his resource in his emergencies. But even that hopeful and trusting mother's patience was wearing to an end, and she had found courage to say so.

'I am not in debt myself, Herries, and I

never shall be. I can do no more.'

'Then I must join the governor and break the entail,' he rejoined, sulkily.

Lady Calderman made no remark—she had become used to the threat.

The sum required on this occasion was of serious dimensions, and the threatened alternative seemed imminent. It was staved off by the Lady Claire, with the assistance of her husband.

The Calderman estates, failing male heirs in the direct line, passed to female heirs, and Mr. Treville was a shrewd calculator. As Herries said, he was put on his legs once more, but only to continue that proverbial hand-gallop to a Satanic bourne.

A few days after the advent of Wiggles, Lord Calderman entered his wife's boudoir, having first ascertained that she was alone.

'Sorry to disturb you, Margaret,' he said, brusquely, bringing the blood to her cheeks as she closed her writing-book and turned to listen, saying nothing. 'It is about

Herries,' he went on. 'I won't have him trifle with Lady Trixie—he's cooling off.'

'It was never more than a fancy,' she replied, coldly. 'He was led on.'

'Then, why the devil did you have her here, if nothing's to come of it?'

'It was arranged last year that she should come; she wrote to remind me of it—I did not renew the invitation.'

'You liked her?'

'In a way, yes. She is clever and amusing, and I believe her capable of strong affection. She likes Herries, I know, but I do not think she would have any abiding influence over him; she has been badly brought up.'

'She has sixty thousand pounds.'

Lady Calderman remained silent. Evidently controlling himself by an effort, he continued,

'It's all very well for you to be indifferent. Your nest's feathered; but there's one thing certain—Herries can't afford to be the

fool his father was, he must marry money.'

She let the brutality pass without a sign.

'I cannot interfere,' she said; 'it would do no good.'

Then, as if following out a foregone intent, he asked, a little uncertainly,

'What has Elmore's daughter? Her mother's fortune came to her, I've heard.'

'I don't know.'

'You don't know what Margaret Graeme had? Excuse me, my lady, but I am hard of belief in matters of faith.'

'I simply state a fact. Mrs. Elmore's fortune when she married was thirty thousand pounds, but she came in for more afterwards—how much I never heard; neither how it was settled.'

'You can ask her—the girl, I mean.'

'Most certainly not; what right have I?'

'Your son's interests. You're no fool, Margaret, and you know quite well why he's cooled on Lady Trixie. He's over head and ears in love, ass as he is, with this

girl ; so you had better see to it, or there will be a smash. I warn you—so don't say I didn't. I was hard hit at the Oaks, and if something isn't done—and sharply too—we'll have to shut up here, and go—honeymooning,' he sneered, 'to Norway ; anywhere out of reach of the beaks.'

She gave no answer, but sat pale and immobile, her right hand just touching the region of her heart ; she was inured to pain.

Still keeping forcibly his vicious rage within bounds, he went on,

' You like Miss Elmore—you would like her for Herries ?'

' For his sake, yes ; for hers, I don't know.'

He sneered.

' You have no faith, then, in a good woman's influence ?'

' Not in desperate cases.'

The words were wrung from her. He laughed.

' Like father, like son,' he said. ' But you forget there are good women, and good

women. Miss Elmore's goodness, I fancy, has the backbone of character, and so is suited to a desperate case, which, with parental candour, I admit Herries' is. I am no purist, but I can't congratulate you on your son, my lady.'

'I cannot interfere,' was her freezing answer, ignoring her husband's insulting personal allusion to her own long-suffering patience.

He waited a moment, and then, with a sudden candour of manner and a show of almost tenderness, he returned to the charge. He was playing for a stake, and she knew it. Her heart was dead to him, so she thought, but she could not disabuse herself of the idea that she still owed him in certain matters a degree of allegiance. She listened patiently.

'I've not been a pattern husband, I know,' he said; 'but I'm not the brute Tremayne is,' naming a certain nobleman of extreme ill-report in his domestic concerns. 'And then there's always a man's temper to be

considered ; a Ninon de L'enclos wouldn't keep some men faithful.'

She paled still more, but remained statue-still.

' And—believe me or not, as you like—but I—I want to keep up the place for your sake as much as my own. Matters are desperate, Margaret, and I ask you to help me. I—throw myself on your generosity, in fact. No,'—seeing by a slight protesting motion that she was about to speak—' no, don't misunderstand me ; I don't want your money.' Try as he would, he could not hide a sneer. ' A few paltry hundreds would only be a drop in the bucket. What I want is simply your co-operation. Either find out what fortune Miss Elmore has, and give Herries *favourable* opportunities to plead his own cause if the money's safe, or, if it isn't, get her out of his way, and help him on with Lady Trixie—there's no mistake there, and I know her mother would move heaven and earth to bring it about.'

She was trembling now ; but she did not hesitate. Suffering, if it had given her the power of endurance almost to the uttermost, had also strengthened her naturally pliant character ; and then he had no longer in her heart the old invincible pleader, love. She replied, gently,

‘Harold,’—calling him by his Christian name, a strange word on her lips now—‘I cannot help you in this matter. The girl is our guest—a sacred trust to me. Even if she loved Herries, and I am sure she does not, I would think it my duty to warn her ; no money, no personal consideration would make me move a step in the matter. And, as for Lady Trixie, if Herries has taken a fancy to Miss Elmore, I should be powerless. You know your son’s headstrong will well enough.’

He was still in repression, his fortunes being desperate.

‘You are revengeful and merciless,’ he said ; ‘but I suppose I deserve it.’

'Not so, Harold,' and she laid her hand on his arm. 'I am only a little dead to old feelings, and mercifully so; but I am alive enough to my duty, and on that you may reckon to the uttermost. Should the worst come to the worst, we can share my income together, in some quiet place on the Continent we should live in plenty. There are no ties it would pain me to sever.'

An expression, but hid by the abrupt raising of his hand to his eyes, of contempt and smothered rage, flitted across his face; but he answered, quietly,

'Utopian, Margaret, as ever; but I am not old enough to be turned out to grass yet. Listen.' He looked her full in the face: a cruel line round his mouth. 'You are woman of the world enough to know that desperate cases require desperate means. It is for you to choose. I shall ascertain Miss Elmore's financial position, and then I give you your choice of three courses, to so manage matters that Herries secures one of

the girls—I should prefer Lady Trixie, her mother has no history,—or to persuade Herries to break the entail of the Hurst-point estate. If you refuse, I shall break up here, and go to Monaco with Herries—he'll be ripe for red or black then. So, my lady, the decision lies with you.'

'My lord,' she said, very quietly, 'I will try to persuade Herries to break the entail under certain conditions, on your promise to make no inquiry respecting your guest's private affairs.'

'There will be no need if Herries agrees,' he replied; 'common sense will tell you that.'

'I must have your promise, nevertheless,' she said, coldly.

'Well, I promise,' he returned; and then, with a sneer, 'and I feel flattered that you trust me enough to accept a promise at my hands.'

'I shall look on you as pledged to your guest, not to me,' she said, with calm dignity.

'When your honour to the world is concerned, I am safe.'

He rose, with a careless yawn.

'Commend me to a smooth exterior for bitterness,' he said. 'What a consolation a woman's tongue must be to her!'

She made no reply; it was not her custom to give gibe for gibe, seldom even to show she understood them. He had not, indeed, lost his power to wound; but the wounds he now inflicted no longer rankled. Yet who could tell the agony of the hardening process—a process so slow in a tender nature, and, from that nature's very tenderness, never complete.

At the door he turned, and, with a smile of malicious pleasure, said,

'I forgot to say I have a telegram from Frankland; he is to be here to-night.'

She rose hastily.

'Stay,' she cried. 'I asked you to put him off. You said you would. It is not too late—let me telegraph. Harold, he

must not come here while Felix Elmore's daughter is our guest.'

'Too late, my lady. I meant to have written, but I forgot. You must carry it off with a high hand. Never fear, you'll rise to the occasion. Besides, who knows now, and who would care if they did know?'

'It is cruel, it is unmanly of you,' she said, with increasing agitation. 'The girl is aware that he was the cause of all the mischief. How much she knows, I cannot tell, but quite enough to make her leave the house if he enters it—and Felix—oh, what would he think of me? Lord Calderman, if you do not prevent John Frankland from coming, I will; and, if he insists, or you insist, I leave. You may make what excuses to your guests you choose, but go I shall, and Margaret Elmore with me.'

He could not afford to defy her—he had too much at stake. So, with an ill grace, he threw her the telegram he had received that morning, and, with an oath, told her

to settle the matter as she liked ; then, slamming the door, he walked off.

The telegram was dated from London. Its contents were to the effect that the sender, John Frankland, would arrive at Monkswood Castle the same afternoon by the 5.30 train.

Quickly filling in a telegram form, Lady Calderman summoned her footman, and desired him at once to despatch a groom to the neighbouring post-town, where there was a telegraph office. When the missive had gone, she breathed again, never doubting that the message would reach its destination in time. But she was un-nerved, her spirit for the time was dead within her. There was the old, dull pain in her heart, half-physical in its vitality ; the old yearning after love vanished on her side, almost as much as on his ; the same carking memory of days that had been, but now could be no more ; the same half-scorn of self that she had loved so light a thing,

and yet the same weary longing for the touch of that vanished hand, the sound of that voice that was still, ah !

‘The true gods sigh for the cost and the pain ;
The reed that grows never more again,
As a reed with the reeds by the river.’

Life was to Margaret Calderman one long regret. The very regret had scotched, if not killed, resentment.

She flung herself into a low chair, her head far back, her cheek pressed on the cushion, her hands listless on her lap. No tears stained her still soft cheeks. She seldom wept now, save for the woe of others, but had the Angel of Death bent over her quivering eyelids then, oh ! how gladly would the sad eyes have closed for ever upon earth. But her task was not ended yet, there was more for her to suffer.

A little quiet, a little silence, and the dark hour passed. She rose and went to her dressing-room. There she found Herries.

'I have just come, mother,' he said. 'I want a word with you, and I was afraid you would not be alone in your boudoir.'

She was pale and languid, and there were dark lines under her eyes. He did not notice these signs of suffering. There was room for nothing in his consciousness but self.

'Yes, Herries,' she answered, sitting down by his side on a low couch, from which he had not had the grace to rise as she entered.

He seemed at a loss for words, not bewildered, but just a little shamed. She relieved him.

'It is about Maggie—Miss Elmore, is it not, dear?' she half whispered.

'Yes,' he replied, quickly; and then added, tenderly for him, 'I never saw anyone like you, mother. You—you—seem to read a fellow's heart. Will you help me?'

'Herries,' she said, gently and lovingly, 'you ask me an impossiblity. In the first place, all the help I could give you would

go a very little way in the direction you wish, unless she were beginning to like you, and you cannot say that she is.'

'Yes, I can,' he interrupted, quickly; 'she's been quite soft to me since the pheasant affair. I know how to play her now. She's like all women—likes admiration, likes to bowl a fellow over, and leave him there perhaps, but she won't play the game with me she has with Brooks. I found out quite by accident that she doesn't even know where he is, a proof there's nothing between them. You see, she was green—new to the world, I mean, and didn't know her own value; she was in a false position, too, and, I daresay, was glad to catch at the first chance to get free; but her eyes have been opened here, I take it, and with all her devilment—pardon me, mother, but she is a little highly spiced, appetising, in short—she is no fool, and I am sure I have a fair field before me. She asks me a lot about Felix, and I work him up for her,

but she never once names Brooks ; my belief is, she has forgotten all about him.'

She let him blunder on, her mother's heart sore for him, her woman's nature in revolt at his blindness to the height and breadth and depth of a love such as she knew Margaret Elmore's heart capable of, but love which she felt was not for him.

'The best way to help you, Herries,' she said, 'is not to meddle, a breath would injure the delicate bloom of a budding love, but I candidly tell you I believe you have no chance, not because of Mr. Brooks—to say the truth, I am quite in the dark on that score—but because of the girl's nature, it is not impressionable, and she has a high standard to which you, my poor boy, do not come up. Then, Herries, she is also in my keeping, and I must guard her even against herself. Ask yourself, dear, are you one to make a woman happy?—not a woman like Trixie Power, whose affections would be equally divided, after a

little while, between her husband and society, perhaps drift to the latter altogether in the course of years, but not so with Margaret Elmore. She will cast her lot all on one die. Love with her will be the breath of life, it will be all sufficient to fill her life ; but wrong that love, set even lightly by it, or weary of it, and I tell you, Herries, if it did not turn to hate—for she is strong, not yielding like me,—she would, in the words of the old song, just “lay her down and dee.” There is no middle course for natures like Maggie Elmore’s.’

‘The arguments you use against me are in my favour, mother,’ replied Herries, earnestly. ‘Don’t you see that a woman like that is just the one to keep a fellow straight. See here’—he took his mother’s hand in his and held it tightly—‘see here, mother, I’ll cut the turf, every sod of it, the Jockey Club, Tattersall’s, all ; I’ll abjure even donkey races, join the Blue Ribbon army, turn model farmer, J.P., anything

respectable, settle every penny of her fortune on herself, and free enough of the property to pay my father's most pressing debts, and my own, of course.'

She flushed painfully. It was her hour of temptation, but the spirit had been purified and strengthened by suffering, and she pressed on steadily.

'Herries,' she said, laying her other hand on the one he still held, 'your father was with me to-day; he has urged me to persuade you to open the Hurstpoint property, or to marry Lady Trixie Power or Margaret Elmore for the sake of their fortune. I promised to use what influence I had with you to break the entail, but no further. His affairs, and yours too, I suppose, are desperate, he says.'

A hard expression chased the softer look Herries' face had worn while pleading his love-cause with his mother; he released her hand, and said, shortly,

'My father deserves no consideration at

your hands, and as little at mine ; I am what he has made me. He's a young man yet, and he'll only begin afresh, now I purpose to turn over a new leaf. The sale of Hurstpoint means dropping an income of £4,000 a year ; but I'll tell you what, I'll do it the day Margaret Elmore says me "yes."

'I asked you for no such pledge, Herries, and I decline to accept it. But I'll do this much—convince me of the sincerity of your intention to reform, cut all connection with the turf, say nothing to Miss Elmore for six months, but let your daily life be patent to her observation, and I will give you every opportunity of following up the good impression you may have made. I make no bargain about the entail—that is a matter to be disposed of by itself—do it for me, if you will, or for your own interests, but not in any way in connection with my charge. The heart is kittle ware, Herries, and it may be you will win Maggie's—I cannot

say. Few girls could say you nay'—she pressed her lips on his now sullen brow—‘but Maggie Elmore is not like any girl I ever knew. But oh, laddie, strong and sweet and fresh as she is, your real change must be within yourself. First, let her see she can trust you—let her know, if you will, you are trying to be worthy of her, and—for she will see you every day—she may come to love you; but, Herries, I do not think she ever will.’

He had listened patiently enough, but an ugly storm was gathering in his eyes.

‘I know more of her story than you think,’ he muttered; ‘she may not find it easy to pick and choose.’

‘You can know nothing that would prevent the highest in the land from seeking her hand; she is as pure and true as her mother was.’

‘Then, there’s a mistake somewhere,’ he said, with a sneer.

‘I do not know where you got your in-

formation, Herries, but whoever says a word against Mrs. Elmore speaks untruth. We were cousins in a degree, and loving friends. She was the victim of some strange misconception, but it is too late now. Mr. Elmore has done her tardy justice, for in acknowledging her daughter as his he also acknowledges his error, to call it by no stronger name. It is cruel to revive these sad stories. A man who really loved would not, even to himself, breathe a word of detraction in connection with the girl he loved. To him everyone belonging to her would be sacred. There is no chivalry in your love, Herries.'

He sprang to his feet with a smothered oath.

'You'll repent this some day, mother,' he cried, fiercely. 'I gave you an opening to reclaim me,' he laughed; 'you have despised it, your day of grace has gone, so you must take the consequences, for as surely as that sun is shining, so surely will I win

Margaret Elmore for my wife, by fair means if I can, and, if not, by foul. It might have been wiser to help to whitewash a devil than to give him an extra supply of pitch.'

With these words he flung himself off.

'God help me to keep my hands clean,' was Margaret Calderman's inward prayer. Her heart yearned over her son, and she feared her own strength; but in the tumult of conflicting affection and duty stood firm and clear her protecting love for the young girl she had taken to her home. Not even to make her son all that her highest aspirations could point to would she put one finger forward to bring these two together. She tried, in all singleness of purpose, to regard her old friend's daughter, from every circumstance of birth and present relation to herself, as a something too sacred to be approached with an ulterior view of personal benefit, and she inly determined, that, should she see any symptom of Herries gaining favour in the girl's eyes, she would

tell her the naked truth, and paint Herries as he was.

It was now luncheon hour, and Lady Calderman, repressing with an effort all signs of emotion, hurried to her dressing-room, to hide, if she could, her pallor with a little extra rouge.

There had been a riding-party arranged at breakfast, to witness a cricket match at some miles distant. Wiggles had consented to ride a horse belonging to Herries, a particularly handsome chestnut. Lady Trixie, to her intense chagrin, was assigned Lady Calderman's well-trained and, as Herries said a little maliciously, 'perfectly safe' mare. Mrs. Cashel had secured a very knowing-looking, business-like roadster, whose conduct under a skirt was held to be doubtful; but Mrs. Cashel knew what she was about in the saddle. The gentlemen were Herries, Lord Fantum, and a Colonel Elmé Campbell—that mysterious individuality, a man about town, with no

particular *locus standi*, being a colonel of volunteers, and related in a very far-off and mythical degree to the Argyll chief. He had also, it was said, no ostensible source of income. Yet he never seemed, and certainly never complained of being, hard-up ; but he kept no horse, and did very little on the turf. He occupied a quiet room in Jermyn Street, and belonged to three of the best clubs. He was everywhere in the season, at all royal entertainments, and had a season stall at the opera. In the autumn he turned up promiscuously in some of the best country-houses, and anon at Homburg, attached, perhaps, to some aristocratic family in the languid search after the health impaired by late hours and high feeding.

Some portion of the year he was sure to be seen or heard of at Monaco, where he had the quiet reputation of a moderately successful operator. Latterly there had been occasional whispers that Elmé Camp, as he was familiarly designated, had a calling

peculiar in itself, and not tabulated in the recognised avocations of money-making, professional or commercial ; this calling—so the whispers went—was touting for money-lenders. If it were true, the secret was well kept. There is no more binding honour than ‘honour among thieves.’ As a strange corollary to these whispers, Elmé Campbell was never by any chance met with in the households of thoroughly financial stability, except as one of a crowd. As a rule, men of blameless reputation either avoided, or were avoided by him ; so also in the case of well-to-do men. They did not need each other ; they did not probably approve of each other.

Mrs. Cashel and Colonel Elmé Campbell were very good friends—intimate, indeed, to a certain degree. They seemed to have a mutual pleasure in each other’s society, and frequently turned up together, by arrangement, at the same houses.

There was no more accomplished *cavalier*

servent than the colonel—perhaps he had found ladies a valuable adjunct in his peculiar calling. He ‘knew everything,’ Mrs. Cashel said, and ‘what he didn’t know he was sure to find out,’ and she would add, with a light laugh that had, or had not, as it was taken, a latent meaning, ‘He was useful.’

But Herries did not appear at luncheon. It seemed likely that a recruit must be procured to take his vacant place in the riding expedition. Lady Trixie was put out, and showed it. This was not unusual. When so disturbed, she was apt to use rather strong language ; it was a safety-valve to a more forcible explosion.

The horses were at the hall-door waiting to be mounted ; the chestnut more than usually fresh, Lady Calderman’s mare sleek and gentle.

‘Hang it !’ said Lady Trixie, contemplating her steed from the door steps. ‘I’d as soon ride a circus palfrey,’ adding coarsely,

'she'll make me sea-sick.' Then, taking a hasty survey of the rest of the cavalcade, she stepped up a little imperiously to Colonel Elmé, and proposed that they should change saddles.

'What!' he cried, wilfully misunderstanding her. 'I in yours and you in mine! Ah! not if I know it, lady fair.'

'Bosh!' she replied, irritated. 'You know what I mean—exchange horses, I mean. Yours has go in it—it's a hunter, I know—but I am not a duffer, and it will be safe with me, won't it, Lord Calderman?' and she put her hand on that nobleman's arm coaxingly. She had to explain.

'I'd trust Lady Trixie with the pick of the stall,' he said, gallantly. 'If Colonel Campbell likes to resign in her favour, he has my consent, and if he does not approve of my lady's paces—they're more *en règle* than mine, I can assure him—he can get another from the stables.'

With perfect good-nature the colonel made the exchange.

'I've an adaptable leg,' he said, as he mounted, 'and I rather like a steady goer.'

'You're the best "leg up" I know,' whispered Mrs. Cashel, as she veered her horse round, vainly trying to steady it for the start.

'Don't be a fool,' she said, encouragingly, as she patted its jerking head. 'You'll have it all your own way directly.'

The horse seemed to understand that it had 'business' on its back; it grew more submissive, and only now and then attempted to back upon its equally mettlesome neighbours, or to sidle up against one of the pillars of the portico.

Wiggles, at the request of the groom in attendance, mounted last.

'Mr. Herries skirted him himself these three days, ma'am,' said the man, reassuringly; 'a firm hand is all that's wanted. I'd ride in the rear, though; nothing sets a horse's mettle going like feet ahind of him.'

Wiggles was not foolhardy, though fear-

less. She observed the man's hints. But, just as she was springing into the saddle, Herries appeared on the rise of the avenue leading to the stables. He came at a quick trot, and, lifting his hat to the assemblage, took up his place as a matter of course by the side of Wiggles.

'It is Dart,' she said. 'You never told me.'

'I wanted to surprise you. Felix let me have him at last. He only came an hour ago. I went to the train to meet him. He's fresh, as you see, so we had better be off.'

With a glow of pleasure, Wiggles contemplated the fiery animal, her brother's favourite. Her heart beat as she thought of the momentous night of her encounter with the tramp—of the moonlight walk home across the fields—Dart, meek as a lamb, following Ralph Brooks, and Friar Tuck, obedient as a child, walking by her side. But Herries was no thought-reader, happily for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘ It was the saying of a great man that if we could trace our descents, we should find all slaves to come from princes, and all princes from slaves.’

HERRIES was learning tact. The necessities of love were apt trainers. He kept the conversation upon Felix; he was then sure of attention. Now and again the impatient Dart and spirited chestnut pushed into the front rank, on which occasions Mrs. Cashel’s roadster showed its vulgar breeding by a whisk of its switch tail and an uncertain gallop—a splutter, as Trixie called it—which sent gravel up in the air, and at times seemed likely to end in the hedgerow.

The horse Lady Trixie had taken in exchange for Lady Calderman’s, though used

to a side-saddle, was not a lady's steed. It was a powerful animal, and it required all her skill and management to keep it within bounds. Lord Fantum's also needed a tight hand, and its mouth was hard. All going together at about the same pace—a swinging trot, matters were pleasant enough; but Dart, and the chestnut ridden by Wiggles, warming to the road, soon became all but unmanageable.

'You'd better take the lead,' cried Colonel Elmé, 'or it will be a stampede soon.'

And this Wiggles and Herries did. In a few minutes they were out of sight.

'That's a new importation of Heron's,' said Lord Fantum to Trixie, when they had reduced their pace to an easy canter. 'I know it. It was bred at Cartmel. I saw young Elmore on it last hunting season; a difficult beast it was, too; took everything flying, but was just as likely to baulk as clear. Elmore's a splendid rider, and Heron's not bad; but he can't touch Elmore.'

His sister seems worthy of her stock ; the Elmores were all horsey. No hand but hers, I take it, could manage the spitfire she's on. Her seat's magnificent.'

Trixie touched her mettlesome steed in the flank, and it required all my Lord Fantum's address to avoid a sudden acquaintance with the bottom of the ditch at the road-side.

In the meantime, Wiggles was in full enjoyment of her free gallop along the turf sides of the road. There was no opportunity for more than a flying remark. They drew rein with difficulty at a disused toll-gate, in obedience to a gesture from an old man in a smock-frock.

When reduced to a walking pace, Herries asked what was wanted.

'There's a traction ingin ahead of you, sir,' said the rustic, civilly, 'an' I don't think as your cattle'll stand it.'

Herries tossed the man a shilling, and, knowing the country well, he proposed to

his companion to take a rather circuitous cut through the fields, which would bring them out on the road a mile or so further on.

The proposal pleased Wiggles.

'There's a ha-ha and a stream,' said Herries. 'You won't object, I know. The chestnut's good for anything, and so is Dart, if he won't baulk.'

Wiggles was charmed. She was in high spirits with the congenial exercise, and fearless.

Desiring the man to warn the rest of the party, and to open the gate of a field to the right, Herries said,

'We'll give them their heads over the downs there, and they'll be well in hand when we come to the open.'

And this they did. They had taken two streams and a difficult ha-ha, when, making at a quiet trot for a gate opening into the road, Dart suddenly shied, and the chestnut, startled, set off at a gallop.

'Take the round of the field, Miss Elmore,' shouted Herries, subduing his refractory steed with difficulty. At the same moment, the cause of the disturbance issued from behind a sheep-hurdle. It was a tramp.

Herries saluted him with an oath.

'Fair and softly, young sir,' answered the fellow, advancing to within a respectful distance of Herries' arm. 'Yer horse should know me, an' yerself too ;' and he took off his weather-beaten Melton, and, running his dingy fingers through his hair, looked Herries in the face.

'It's Bill Biles, the best tout on the sod, as sporting gents knows ; that was when times was better, an' he could put-in a respectable appearance. They've been main bad this year, an' sure, but I'm on a lucky scent now. I was on my way now to Monkswood Castle, a-purpose to get a word with you. I knows all the short cuts from here to ——shire, an' I was restin' a bit

when I heard you a-comin'. Yon's Miss Elmore, as she's called now, isn't it? Wiggles as was down Cartmel ways.'

Herries, who had had sundry dealings with Mr. Biles, had taken out some silver to throw to him, but stayed his hand at the mention of Wiggles' name. The fellow, quick as lightning, saw his advantage, and approached nearer, replacing his battered head-gear.

'If you'll stand my figure,' he said, 'I'll put you up to a queer game. I knows all that Elmore business, an' what came of the young un's mother. So, if you've a mind on her—what's one man's poison's another man's meat'—this in an undertone—'I'll put you on a easy way, outside of church or parson.'

'You d——d scoundrel!' cried Herries, with sudden passion, cutting the fellow across the shoulders with his whip. 'How dare you! If you show your face within a mile of Monkswood, I'll telegraph to Scot-

land Yard, and you know what that means,
you——'

At that moment, Wiggles appeared in the distance, coming up at a leisurely trot, the chestnut well in hand.

With a volley of oaths, the fellow pulled his hat over his brow, and turned away, making for a gap in the hedge which led into a neighbouring field. When at, as he supposed, a safe distance, he stopped, veered round, shook his fist in the air, and cried,

'That's how the land lies, is it? We're doing the honourable, are we?—don't want poor Bill Biles—mean to cut old pals. We'll see. I knows what I knows. It's the tutor chap she's sweet on, so there's one for yer; but Bill Biles'll put a spoke in yer wheels, an' hers too—she-devil she is! Bigger nobs nor Squire Elmore's been scragged afore this. Ye'll have to put Jack Ketch among yer family portraits at the castle if ye've a mind for a father-in-law of their kidney.'

Herries sprang Dart at the fellow, but he was too nimble, and, as Wiggles came up just in time to catch a glimpse of his countenance, he dashed through the gap, leaving rags on the thorns to mark his progress, and under the lea of the hedge disappeared.

Wiggles had recognised her enemy ; she had also heard his departing threats. Pale as death, she waited for Herries to return to her side ; when he did so, she had recovered her composure in a measure, though not a vestige of colour had returned to her cheeks and lips ; she said nothing, but looked questioningly into Herries' face.

' Only an insolent tramp,' he replied to her mute interrogation ; ' the country's full of them.'

She made no remark, but her heart was full of dread. The light had gone out of her eyes, the elastic spring from her seat in the saddle, the nerve from her hand on the reins.

' Did he scare you ?' asked Herries, concerned.

‘Yes,’ she said, simply. ‘I have a horror of tramps.’

‘You got a fright from one at Cartmel, didn’t you?’ he asked, on a sudden impulse.

‘Yes,’ she again replied; and then, as if to turn aside a disagreeable subject, added, with a light laugh that had no ring in it, ‘I think he owed the bogey a grudge—don’t you remember I showed it to you at the Lodge?’

‘No, not to me,’ he answered, quickly—‘to Brooks.’

A faint colour, like the first flush of dawn, returned to her delicate cheek.

‘And Felix,’ she added, in a low tone.

They had reached the high road by this time, and at a rapid pace soon neared their destination, a large park, where the cricket match was going on. But Wiggles did not return to her buoyant self that day.

The rest of the party had followed in their track. As they left the fields for the high road, in the same manner as Wiggles

and her companion had done, they encountered the tramp, who officially held the gate open for them to pass out. Lord Fantum flung him half-a-crown, and, with Lady Trixie, trotted on. Colonel Elmé was following without even a 'thank you,' Mrs. Cashel some paces in advance.

'That's not the way you're goin' to pass an old friend, colonel?' said the fellow, touching his hat respectfully.

The colonel turned sharply to the voice, and encountered a pair of keen, evil eyes, fixed on him almost defiantly.

'Biles,' he said, 'what the —— are you doing here?'

'On a business, colonel, that'll pay better nor welching—a sort o' touting, so all in the 'gitimate line of work, you see. I can put a good thing in your way, if you'll make an appointment.'

'Where?' asked the colonel.

'At Wroughton,' naming the little post-town adjoining the castle.

‘Very well ; I’ll ride back in that direction. You can be at the cross roads near the back entrance to the castle. I can leave my party at the front lodge.’

With a side-jerk of his head, which meant menace, Biles held up his open hand, into which, with a grudging gesture, the colonel dropped one shilling.

‘You’ll have to do things handsomer if it’s to be business, colonel,’ he said, still holding his hand up.

With a stifled curse, Elmé dropped half-a-sovereign on the road, and trotted after his companion.

Next week saw Mr. Biles in the outer garb of respectability, and installed in the stables of a well-known trainer, about ten miles distant from Monkswood Castle. The duties he was to be called upon to perform were not in any way to involve any degree of trust ; but Bill Biles had a keen eye, and much of that kind of horsey knowledge, which seems to come naturally to certain knavish

intelligences, in all matters connected with racing-stock, and Colonel Elmé Campbell and the trainer were on excellent terms.

Lady Calderman's telegram had not been in time, for at the hour Lord Calderman had named the Right Honourable John Frankland, the Home Secretary, arrived at the Castle. ‘Through a strange misapprehension of his orders,’ so Lord Calderman said. He was shown, without the usual interrogatory notice, straight to the boudoir, where the select few of my lady’s guests were having afternoon tea.

Mr. Frankland was a large, heavy man, fifty years of age, according to ‘Men of the Time,’ nearer sixty, according to the arbitrary mileage of wear and tear. He was habitually grave, and had the reputation of being, in a mild way, a woman-hater. But, when he pleased, he had winning ways with women, and even now, with the silver creeping up his massive beard, and glinting here and there among his dark, abundant

hair, he might have won, all for love, many a lovely season belle with rank and wealth, and many such sighed in vain. John Frankland dwelt alone. He had no woman friend. There were occasional allusions made, mostly by reminiscent gossips, in which the fair sex bore a prominent part, and that not always the most reputable, but to the ephemerae known as society, ancient scandals have no savour, unless, indeed, they affect practically persons or events of the present. Mr. Frankland had sowed his wild oats; he was now a rising statesman, and a little eccentric, or, at least, not quite like other people, inasmuch as he seemed to have very little that was not official in common with the great world in which he moved. Still he appeared erratically on the surface of society, and was often to be met with in shooting-lodges in the Highlands, and among shooting-parties at country houses. He was an eager sportsman. In manner he was genial, never, unless to

intrusion, ‘stand off,’ had the name of being open-handed to necessity, and was whispered to be a liberal supporter of all institutions and societies whose object was the suppression of immorality or the reclamation of unfortunate women, conscience-money, detractors called it—and perhaps with truth.

Lady Calderman had known him from early youth ; at one time their intimacy had been great, but, though there had been neither quarrel nor misunderstanding between them, they had drifted asunder as if by mutual agreement, yet always, when they did meet, showing evident signs of regard.

But now his presence was a severe shock to his old friend ; she had, however, well-disciplined tact, and, after a moment’s stun, rallied, cool and calm. Fortunately for the crisis, Lady Trixie and Wiggles were singing a duet together, and the attention of the few present was centred in the performance, which was a little novel, the former,

on the harp, accompanying the latter on the piano.

With a gesture as if to enforce silence on behoof of the music, Lady Calderman met her unwelcome guest in the middle of the room, and drew him to a quiet corner, where in a few words she explained matters to him. He was much startled and annoyed.

'I can leave in the morning,' he said. 'I did not come direct from home, or your telegram would have been in plenty of time.'

'I wrote to you some weeks past,' she replied, 'and told you the arrangement I had come to with Mr. Elmore, and also that I had promised to make, for a given period, no inquiries into poor Claire's sad story.'

'Yes; but I made sure Miss Elmore had not joined you yet; first, because of my invitation here, and, secondly, because you did not write again.'

'A stupid mistake,' she said. 'We must make the best of it, and take care not to rouse observation. There are sure to be

some here who will recollect your share in the story; but I don't think anyone would have the bad taste to speak of it—in any case, to those concerned; and, as for the rest, we can't expect chivalry in modern society. Some one says that "society smoothes down the edge of your thoughts and manners, and, if it does not always inspire to the right thing, it certainly prevents its votaries from saying the wrong."

Frankland smiled sadly.

'Do you know what Jacobus says, that "one cannot ask any person to meet another in one's own house without going through a sum of moral arithmetic." I wish Calderman had been in a calculating mood when he asked me.'

'John, she is the living image of her mother.'

As Lady Calderman spoke, her eyes turned to Wiggles. The song was ended, and Lady Trixie was striking a few muffled chords, not in continuance of the melody

just ended, or in commencement of another, but idly, as it were. Her brow was clouded; she was trying to catch the whisper Herries was dropping into her rival's ear, and she succeeded in part, for her colour came and went, and the muffled chords became discords.

Wiggles was smiling, in raillery, disclaiming, evidently, some compliment. Her sweet face was still pale; but her eyes were lustrous. Her lips were parted, and her head, posed to the side, was thrown back, with an action of pretty *hauteur*. She was leaning sideways against the wall, her outstretched hand resting, like a bird ready for flight, on the edge of the pianoforte.

Frankland had followed his hostess's gaze. A start, as of sudden pain, and a muttered ejaculation told her the effect the vision, as she knew it seemed to him, of his first love had upon him. She put her hand on his, repressively.

'Go now,' she said, 'and talk to Mrs.

Cashel for a few minutes. I must manage a whisper to Maggie before she hears your name. I am very sorry, John, but it will be better if you leave to-morrow.'

'I'll receive a telegram,' he said. 'Of course I leave.'

The situation helped itself, as an awkwardness does sometimes. Colonel Campbell had joined Herries and Wiggles at the piano, and the trio were discussing something with animation.

'It is about Rab,' cried Wiggles, as Lady Calderman approached. 'Colonel Campbell won't believe he is a true Dandie.'

'I vote we summon the claimant and take evidence,' said Herries.

'I have his pedigree,' said Wiggles, loftily.

'Pedigrees are adaptable,' observed the colonel.

'And elastic,' she retorted.

He smiled. Elmé was not thin-skinned on his descent. He had stated it vaguely as a fact, and left the fact to take care of itself.

'I've seen him,' he said, with a final air.

'I've all the points on paper,' she insisted, 'and he doesn't fail in one.'

'Then summon him,' said Herries again, 'and we'll form a jury.'

'I'll be the crier,' said the colonel, provokingly.

'The decrier, you mean,' was her tart reply, as she flitted out of the room to bring in the object of dispute.

Lady Calderman followed her, laughing.

'Impannel the jury,' she said. 'Mr. Frankland is an authority on the terrier and its ramifications; he'll be judge.'

A few words prepared Wiggles for the *contretemps* of Mr. Frankland's presence. She became very pale, but made no remark, except that they would meet on neutral ground, and that she was glad his visit would end on the morrow.

'He is a large-hearted, stern man, Maggie,' said Lady Calderman. 'He has sought your mother far and near; has spent five thou-

sand pounds on the search. He believes she is still alive. I only tell you this,' she added, hurriedly, remembering by the expression of Wiggles' face that she was on forbidden ground, 'to prepare you, in case he should—should—well, dear, I mean, in case he might attempt to touch on the affair to you. You see, when a man has a fixed idea, he is apt to be impracticable sometimes. He is not always sure of himself; and, Maggie darling, John Frankland hates your father.'

The look with which Wiggles replied to this speech was one of infinite and pathetic tenderness and pity. She took the dog up in her arms, and said, as she turned her face aside,

'My poor father!' Then, in a light but forced tone, she cried, 'Dear Lady Calderman, I always feel strong beside you. You will give him no opportunity to speak to me, I am sure, and I shall be on my guard. Is he—he——' She hesitated, flushed, then

turned pale, and hurried the remainder of the sentence. ‘Is he friendly with General Horseman?’

‘Yes, on intimate terms; and he is a man of few intimacies. He wishes to be thought a mere official, and shuns society; but we were old friends, and I often see him. He is one of the few leal to old associations.’

The jury were impanelled on their return to the boudoir, and Mr. Frankland, as judge, stood facing it. The members were Lord Fantum, Herries, a Mr. Dredger, who had shown symptoms of what Mrs. Cashel called ‘the Wiggles’ delusion,’ that caustic lady herself, Lady Trixie Power, Miss Prosser, not quite an old maid, but by no means a young one—bland, and deprecatory, and rich. Lady Calderman was added to the number, at her own request. They grouped round a table. Wiggles, with the claimant, on one side of the umpire, and Colonel Campbell, the demurrer, on the other.

'Mr. Frankland, Miss Elmore,' said Lady Calderman, in a careless, conventional manner. The parties named acknowledged the introduction by an almost imperceptible bow, without raising their eyes.

Rab, unused to such company, when placed by Wiggles in the centre of the table facing Mr. Frankland, looked inquiringly and reproachfully into her face, his ears drawn back, and a deprecatory expression on his countenance. He had lain down, as if uncertain as to the stability of the table. He was by no means at his ease, but Rab was inured to implicit obedience, and watched his mistress's face for his cue.

Wiggles had opened a document, but she was not as cool as usual, and turned it backwards and forwards with an uncertain air.

'The court is informal,' said Lady Caldermán, coming to her rescue. 'I will state the case for my young friend.'

Mr. Frankland looked assent. He was gradually recovering his composure.

‘Colonel Elmé Campbell questions the claim of Miss Elmore’s dog, Rab, to be a Dandie Dinmont terrier. He states that his canine knowledge is unimpeachable, and has challenged the claimant to an open inspection. Miss Elmore, on her part, is prepared with genealogical proof of her favourite’s descent, and, to substantiate it, has produced the claimant in person.’

‘Miss Elmore will perhaps read the pedigree,’ said Frankland.

‘I must tell Rab all about it first,’ she answered. ‘He knows his own tongue best. Sit up, my bonny man.’

His familiar Doric acted like magic on Rab. He sprang on his legs, alert and fiery, looking up in Wiggles’ face, his head on one side, with questioning imperativeness.

‘Sit up,’ she said again, ‘and hearken.’

He reared himself on his hind-legs, and faced her, with the faintest attempt at a growl.

‘Canny noo,’ she said, lifting her finger

admonishingly, 'an' hearken. Ye're on yer trial, my man, but on a score which, gin it goes against ye, ye can lay at yer forbears' door, an' no yer ain. There's ane here says ye're no a Dandie, no a Dinmont ava. Noo, Rab, be patient; she patted his head as if to calm him. 'I ken it's hard to bear, an' I ken, an' ye ken, and they'll soon a' ken that there's nae a word o' truth in the count; but ye maun prove it, lad. It's ane Colonel Campbell wha says it. Noo, a' Stuarts are no sib to the King, but Stuart an' Campbell are gude names, and those wha hold them have a right to consideration.'

This she said very demurely; a smile went round, and Colonel Campbell winced.

'I ha'e documentary evidence o' yer claim, Rab, an' it's very gude as far as it goes; we're no above proof;' she cast a sly glance at the demurrer, who, affecting the cynical impassive, only achieved imperturbable impudence; 'but, eh, man Rab,

we're aboon imposition. It'll maybe be best to read the bit paper first, so sit still till I bid ye stir.'

She then, with a pretty importance, her eyes literally dancing with fun and mischief, unfolded a paper and addressed the judge.

'My lord,' she said, 'I believe that the chief characteristics of a British jnry are ignorance of law, density of comprehension, inclination to personal prejudices, a disposition to foregone conclusions, and a *dogged* belief in their own infallibility; but with an unimpeachable judge a sound cause is safe. This bit of paper,' she unfolded it, 'will tell you all about Rab's branch of the Dinmonts, and I'm bound to say, proud as he is of his folk, they're no to say so extra ancient, they're no jist Argylls.' She then read a long list with appropriate data of Jocks, Mysies, Macs, Touters, Tams, Peggies, Megs, Lassies, and Lairds, Rab following the motion of her lips with sensitive intelligence, pricking her ears every now

and again at a familiar name. When she had ended, she handed the pedigree to Lady Calderman to pass round.

‘Noo, Rab,’ she cried, ‘the law’s for you. Ye’re no a true Dinmont, aren’t ye ; then whar did ye get yer silken coat, sae sheeny silvery, sae fine an’ wavy ! It wasna frae the Skyes, I’ll be bound—there’s a wale o’ bristles in that clan—an’ yer wee bit dainty tail, sae straight and skimp, wi’ its feathery tassel like the scud o’ a fleein’ cloud, is there onybody present,—she held a few of the outermost hairs of the organ in question out to their length appealingly to the company,—‘is there onyone present that will trace a switch o’ a Skye’s lang curly-queue here.’

She paused a moment.

‘It’s not the dog, but the dog’s mistress that has a tale to unfold,’ whispered Mrs. Cashel to Lady Trixie. The words reached Wiggles’ ears, and her lip curled. She turned to the dog just a little sharply.

‘No one speaks,’ she said, ‘they ken it’s ower true a tail to meddle wi,’ and then, clasping Rab’s flanks, round which her slender hands met with ease, she cried, ‘an’ yer genty waist, did ye get that frae the muckle-jointed Skyes? if ye did, Rab, they gied you what they never had to gi’e; but there’s them that wadna think even that by-or-dinar’. Do ye ken what the French say when they’re convicted o’ a bit fib—ye dinna like the French, do ye, Rab?’

Rab growled.

‘I was sure o’ it; weel the French say, “Tant pis pour les faits.” And now, sir, stand down.’

She was obeyed willingly.

‘But I’d just like you to tell hoo ye cam’ by such reel legs if no frae the Dinmonts, wha never had a straight shank among them, an’ signs on it they got them to carry their heids, an’ if ever a Skye, or a Pepper-an'-saut, or a tyke of ony degree, had a han’ in that heid, the case ’ll go

agin' ye, lad. I'm no saying it's a model o' symmetry in what is ca'ed due proportion, but it's just a Dandie's—an' gran'. Look at the breadth atween the bonny, glowin', lovin' een, look at the length o' it, look at the lang, silky ears, it's like a craig wi' brackens on its brow, a bit o' isolated-natur', an' that's what yer Dandie Dinmont is.' She gave the dog a gentle impetus. 'Go your rounds, sir, an' ask if there's any as'll ca' ye out o' yer name noo.'

Rab made the circuit of the table as if he understood what was required of him. John Frankland had hung as if fascinated on the pretty Doric affected by Wiggles ; her sweet-toned voice rung in his innermost heart, waking keen memory, and sharp pain in old wounds. Herries had neither eyes nor ears for any other sight or sound but the fair, merry girl, as Trixie found on vain endeavour to win from him `a look or word.

'Love me, love my dog,' said Mrs. Cashel, as the dog neared Herries.

'Lucky dog' he said, giving the animal a passing pat—'lucky dog to have such a special pleader!'

'Pass on,' said Trixie, as he walked under her outstretched arm. 'It is not good taste to believe in the devil.'

'I wish I remembered my Latin,' sighed Mr. Dredger, stroking the dog in his turn; 'it might have helped me in making out the unknown tongue; but I'm ready to swear you're an Italian greyhound, if your mistress wishes it.'

'I give in,' cried Colonel Campbell, receding as Rab approached, an opportunity of which the dog availed himself by reaching the ground at a spring. 'I'll never enter the lists with ladies again; we'll cry quits another time.'

'I dismiss the jury,' said Mr. Frankland. 'The clearest evidence I ever heard.'

"O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason,"'

whispered Mrs. Cashel to Elmé Campbell.

‘What a little vixen !’ he returned. ‘She’d die game.’

‘Hope there’ll be no occasion. I like her. She’s out of the common.’

‘Uncommonly so,’ he replied, with a nasty glitter in his eye.

‘What do you think, Miss Prosser ?’ she suddenly asked of that lady, who had watched the proceedings with a bland smile of general approval.

‘Think about what?’ she answered, with a sweet, vacant look in her large blue eyes.

‘About—Rab, and Rab’s mistress.’

‘What about them? Wasn’t it that they’re both from Dandie Dinmont? Some place in the Highlands, isn’t it? I suppose Miss Elmore speaks the language beautifully; it sounded so like Italian.’

‘Oh, no ; the question was about the dog. Dandie Dinmont is the name of a breed. Miss Elmore was proving its pedigree. Do you understand dogs ?’

‘I’ve always had a dog. I have a pug

just now, but its tail curls—has three twists—so I'm no judge. It—I mean Miss Elmore's dog ; to tell the truth, I thought it was a weasel at first—has a very little straight tail and long hair, so I don't exactly know what to think. Natural history's so difficult, you see ; some say a hound's not a dog, or a dog's not a hound, I forget which, but it was one or the other, and so perhaps a Dandie Dinmont may not be a dog either. It's best to leave difficult things alone, isn't it ? they give offence sometimes.'

'Miss Elmore's lovely, isn't she ?'

'Oh, very lovely.'

'I admire her more—though she's not nearly such a fine woman—than Lady Trixie Power—don't you ?'

'Oh, I'm no judge when it comes to the handsomest ; they're both beautiful—different styles quite, and it's all according to taste ; some admire dark belles, some fair. I was very fair, but I always envied dark eyes—so expressive, you know. Lady

Trixie's are very expressive, so are Miss Elmore's.'

'Dear Miss Prosser,' said Mrs. Cashel, affectionately, 'have you ever an opinion of your own?—you are *so* amiable.'

'Oh, yes. I have a great deal of determination when I choose, but I don't like to hurt anybody's feelings. I always know what to wear without any hesitation, what invitations to accept; I am very firm in refusing subscriptions—it's not nice to read one's name in print—and I always take my doctor's prescriptions, never let anything interfere with them. These are really the essential things for a single female to be firm in. Persons who are always giving decided opinions make others afraid of them, and then they are not popular in society; now no one is afraid of me, and I am welcome wherever I go.'

'What do you think of Mr. Frankland? He must have been very handsome. You knew him long ago, didn't you?'

‘Oh ! yes. He was always very nice ; but I’m no politician, and he is a great one —a statesman, you know. I don’t think women should meddle in politics—do you ? —any more than men should meddle in sewing and cooking ; not but what there are some charming women who advocate woman suffrage. All a matter of opinion, I say. I’m a timid woman, and prefer my humdrum way.’

‘Are you a Conservative or a Liberal?’ asked Mrs. Cashel, still bent on drawing her rather fatuous quarry.

‘Oh ! betwixt and between. That is a thing on which one may have a decided opinion, so I formed mine long ago. I always go, like the *Times*, with the existing government, and I think the Opposition is always in the wrong. We can’t do without a government, so it is right to support it when it is in. But there are a great many able men in the Opposition always.’

‘You have a great many wonderful cures,

have you not?' asked Mrs. Cashel, suddenly changing the subject. 'I mean prescriptions for various ailments.'

'Oh! yes; for the complexion, for white hands, for restoring hair, and for keeping down stoutness; but I'm always afraid of prescribing for others—constitutions are so different. I can recommend my lotion for the hands, though. I'm pretty safe there, I think.'

Mrs. Cashel rose with her hand to her brow.

'They're going to dress for dinner,' she said. 'Just since I began talking to you, my head felt so queer. I thought it might be the first indication of softening of the brain, and, on the homœopathic principle of "a hair of the dog that bit you," I asked if you had a remedy.'

'Oh! I'm of the old school of medicine; but I'm sure the new school does great good. I should advise you to take something strengthening if your brain is weak.'

I should try both systems now ; the brain is like the complexion, you see—it needs skill. My brain is very strong.'

' How delusive are appearances, dear Miss Prosser !'

CHAPTER IX.

'And he who stands upon a slippery place
Makes wire of no vile hold to stay him up.'

THE party at Monkswood Castle was to break up on the morrow. To-night a large number of the country neighbours were entertained.

The dinner was in the great banqueting-hall, a splendid chamber of subdued light, but leading into a vast conservatory, dazzling with beauty and light, gorgeous tropical flowers and trees, and a sparkling fountain. The ceiling of the hall was painted in grey-tinted frescoes, combining the modern festive and ancient classic—grotesque almost in their effects. A soft, shady tint pervaded the chamber, giving an

air of luxurious repose and dreamy stillness. A side-table in a recess, supported by four columns, faultless works of art, groaned under family heirlooms of plate and the glittering trophies of the turf.

It was a brilliant scene. Lady Trixie—in palest yellow satin and gauze, priceless emeralds on her arms and neck, diamond-studded foliage on her bosom, and trailing over her skirt—looked superb. She entered the room with Lord Fantum, and by chance was seated opposite Wiggles, whose allotment was Mr. Dredger; but, by a stroke of management, Herries secured the place on her other side.

Wiggles was also dressed as befitted the occasion, in the faintest perceptible shade of blue, forget-me-nots on her breast, and a splendid rope of pearls round her neck. Her *piquante* and yet *spirituelle* beauty was at its height, and her eyes, that looked with almost wondering admiration at the magnificent Trixie's lavishly displayed charms,

lingered as if fascinated by her bewitching loveliness.

Care seemed a stranger to her radiant brow, the fleeting pleasure of the hour carried her spirit with it, and it seemed hard to believe that tears had ever filled her laughing eyes, or aught but smiles parted her pretty lips.

Herries hung enraptured on her every movement, and Trixie's heart was on fire. Nothing could be more inopportune for Lord Fantum, but he was not quick at seeing things counter to his wishes. He marked Herries' devotion—it pleased him, for he knew, though he would not acknowledge it even to himself, that Herries was, or had been, his rival, and, poor blunderer, he fancied, now that rival was on another quest, his own suit would find favour. He did not understand the feminine heart any more than he understood the difficult art of wooing a reluctant fair.

'How pretty Miss Elmore is,' he said to Trixie. 'Herries is very far gone.'

'I thought you had better taste than to admire mawkish sylvan prettiness,' she returned, contemptuously.

'One may acknowledge a fact without feeling it,' he said, sheepishly. 'She is not my style, and I can't understand Heron's fascination. He had a higher appreciation once.'

'Obtuse idiot,' thought Trixie; she said, aloud, 'He has come to his senses, you see. Don't you think it a good example?'

'Lost them, you mean; but perhaps he is only following his heart, though I never gave Heron credit for such a possession—in any case, he is really gone this time. She is pretty, but to me so insignificant. Spring is a poor substitute for a glorious day in June,' and he looked into Trixie's magnificent eyes adoringly.

'If there is a thing that riles me,' she answered, scornfully, 'it is sentiment. Sentiment is sheet lightning—it is sham.' At the same moment Herries looked up; their

eyes met for a second ; almost as if blinded, Herries dropped his.

‘By Jove !’ he muttered, ‘there is a storm—burns a fellow up—a regular Vesuvius ;’ then, as if in sudden apprehension, he turned tenderly to his companion, and said, quite inconsequently to the subjects they had been discussing,

‘Miss Elmore, how do you and Lady Trixie get on ?’

Wiggles opened her eyes ; but Herries was grave. She smiled, and answered, carelessly,

‘I don’t know ; we’ve never tried the process. I’m a little afraid of her, and don’t perhaps quite understand her ; she has been *en evidence* all her society life. I have only just chipped the shell.’

‘She might be a dangerous foe.’

‘Possibly. She looks volcanic.’

‘Don’t think I intend a liberty, but will you promise me one thing ?’

‘Not in the dark.’ She laughed.

He lowered his voice.

'I believe she can read lips as the deaf do; promise me to avoid any intimacy with her.'

Wiggles instinctively turned her eyes towards Trixie, and encountered a look of haughty defiance, which the next instant changed to one of sinister contempt. She lowered her lids, and spoke without raising them.

'She does not like me; there is no need to promise.'

'She can be fascinating when she likes, and dangerous.'

She threw her head up a little proudly.

'I don't like discussing people, and I don't like expressing personal opinions; but you need not fear, I can take care of myself.' Then she added, a little mischievously, 'You were great friends once, were you not?'

'Once—are still. Platonism is safe.'

'Not always; one side may catch fire.'

Platonic friendship means sympathy, and sympathy is always dangerous.'

'You speak with knowledge.'

She blushed; but answered, quickly,
'I am a close observer.'

'Some one says knowledge must be gained by ourselves.'

'Possibly, but self-knowledge must be the growth of years, if the Chelsea seer is right—for he says that "what we have done is the only mirror that can show us what we are," and I have done so little as yet.'

'You have done something you can never undo,' he said, in a low, hot whisper.

'Tell me at once,' she said, in a tone of light banter, 'that I may begin my life-long repentance without delay.'

'I don't want you to repent.'

'Then the mysterious something is better not undone?'

'Perhaps; at any rate, I hope so.'

'You are enigmatical.'

'Shall I be explicit?'

There was a tone in his voice that warned her. She turned quickly to Mr. Dredger, who was sulking drearily, and asked him if he was good at conundrums.

He brightened up.

'I like them,' he said. 'What is it?'

'What is it, Mr. Herries?' she repeated.

'It was only meant for your ears,' he replied, just a little crossly; 'besides, it would be no enigma to Dredger—a fellow feeling makes one wondrous cute.'

'Enigmas—conundrums!' said the important dowager, whom Herries had charge of. 'How rash young people are; nothing interferes with digestion so much as brain work. You should let your higher faculties slumber at dinner, and only use your senses. I wish you would tell me who some of the strangers are—the country specimens, I mean.'

'I'll try,' answered Herries, inwardly anathematising the portly dame, widow of a Conservative peer, the Earl of Lordlie. 'I

daresay Dredger will help me; he's a thoroughbred rustic, a true specimen of the expiring species—country squires. The young lady beside Colonel Campbell is Miss Tansley, the best lawn-tennis player anywhere, almost. Red elbows! ah, yes; freckled too; speaks vernacular; old family, I believe, but wants transplanting. The elderly lady opposite her is her mother. She is a widow, as you see. Her son—that is he beside Mrs. Cashel—he is the squire of our village. No, he is not at his ease. He lives in the stables; breeds cart-horses; wants to marry the blacksmith's daughter—suppose he will. On his other side is our rector's daughter—primitive dress, is it? Well, I never notice what these sort of people wear. What does it matter? The rector's not bad, out of the pulpit. His wife ran away with his curate. Don't wonder; he wasn't a domestic saint—keeps fighting-cocks. Further down, with his thumbs in his waistcoat-

pockets, is the family medico. Yes, fond of good port. No, we draw the line at the females—but they're more presentable than most of the natives. Oh! you know Mrs. Pleader and her husband. He is our deedsman, as I call him—rolling in riches. Yes, Mrs. Pleader was presented—ambitious; county solicitor, and all that. She's clever, and passes capitally, but electro-plate. Her gracious Majesty waives the hall-mark. Money has revolutionised society; but the king always has his closet, you know. One must go with the stream, however.'

The expansive dame laughed.

'Youth is reckless,' she said; 'but there is still a remnant who have not bowed the knee to Baal. I, for one, never recognise new creations, except from ourselves. Every elevation from the people is a nail in our coffin; for you know that Free Trade is the death of Monopoly.'

'Oh, we have hardly gone so far as yet,'

said Herries. ‘This sub-elevation is buying the enemy over cheaply, and new creations are very exclusive. Their money keeps up the glitter of the old institutions; the day of land as a power is declining fast.’

‘*Après moi le Déluge,*’ said the dowager.

Wiggles turned at the words, and smiled. Herries was leaning back in his chair, and her smile was caught by Lady Lordlie.

‘Poor posterity,’ she sighed.

‘I am afraid Mr. Heron inclines to Liberalism,’ said Lady Lordlie.

‘The best beginning for a Tory,—the legitimate one, in fact,’ answered Wiggles. ‘Youth is romantic, and a budding politician imagines the people must have wrongs, so he goes-in for reforms all round—in a little he sees this means undermining the institutions of the country—sudden reaction sets in, and he becomes a rabid Tory.’

‘Et vous?’ asked Herries.

‘Oh, I! I am an optimist,’ and she shrugged her shoulders.

'In a measure,' said Lady Lordlie, sententiously, 'politics are vulgar ; a female politician is to me a something sinister.'

'There are no such enthusiasts as women,' said Wiggles, 'and when a woman does meddle in politics she means it. You must grant that.'

'Oh, I—I believe in society.'

'Politics have nothing apart from society : they run together, on separate but parallel lines ; and what would society be without women ?'

'Very dull, I grant you, but perhaps more respectable. I don't believe in women ; do you, Mr. Heron ?' and the ample and bland dowager looked smilingly at Herries.'

'*A outrance*,' he replied, emphatically, turning to Wiggles.

'Time is disillusionising,' observed Lady Lordlie, pityingly. 'Does Miss Elmore believe in men à *outrance* ?'

'The subject is beyond me,' was the arch reply.

‘ Ah, beware, the sense of ignorance is the first fruit of the deadly tree of knowledge.’

‘ I would fain be your Gamaliel,’ whispered Herries.

She laughed.

‘ “ Where ignorance is bliss,” you know.’

The dowager discreetly put up her eye-glass and swept the upper end of the table ; still with her eyes averted, she said, slightly inclining her head to Herries,

‘ Wherever I go, I meet that Colonel Campbell. I believe he is ubiquitous, and Mrs. Cashel, too. What has become of Mr. Cashel ?’

‘ He is prospecting mines in America, or something of the sort,’ Herries answered, not a little bored.

‘ Oh, at the risk of being undermined at home ?’

‘ The lady is equal to the occasion.’

‘ And the occasion is worthy of the lady ! How charged society is becoming with adventurers.’

‘Yes, one mercy is, they generally explode soon.’

‘But never without mischief to some one.’

‘In the nature of things; but Mrs. Cashel is clever.’

‘Clever people demoralise society.’

‘I have heard from Lady Calderman,’ said Wiggles, simply and gracefully, ‘of Lady Lordlie’s receptions. All the talents used to be there, she said.’

‘I made a merit of necessity,’ replied the dowager, condescendingly,—she felt the attraction of the young girl’s manner—‘a necessity that no longer exists. I am alone now, and can draw the line without injury to vested interests,’ she smiled superciliously; ‘and be advised by an old campaigner,’ she proceeded to eat some game more decidedly high than Wiggles seemed to like—‘if you wish to shine in society, and to be popular, avoid being clever. If you are clever, don’t let others discover it; study refined commonplace—nothing puts

people so much at their ease; where no one is dominant, there is no one to fear. You can indulge your proclivities on the surface of the outer world, where the fourth estate is well represented, but in the inner ring, so to speak, of recognised society endeavour to preserve the unities, there wit is vulgar, opinion is *bêtise*, and talent a *lusus naturæ*.'

'When society is high art, one requires a model,' said Wiggles, demurely.

'Were I responsible for you,' returned Lady Lordlie, 'I should tremble for my credit; an original neophyte is *difficile*.'

'And I,' put in Mr. Dredger, with a valiant effort at conversational ease, 'I prefer the wild rose.'

'To what?' Lady Lordlie put up her eye-glass.

'A standard, an exotic, a—a gloire-de-Dijon, or,' getting redder and redder under the binocular observation, 'or a peony.'

Herries had the bad manners to laugh; Wiggles bit her lips and looked down.

A champagne bottle happily interposed, and Lady Lordlie, who was generally good for each round, drank a glass frigidly. She then looked kindly at Wiggles and said,

‘We shall see you in town next season, I hope. You must not waste your sweetness on the desert air.’

Mr. Dredger growled in a voice, his undertone ; he was horsey, he was doggy, and the growl was at kennel and stable pitch.

‘Lady Calderman is to take me out, I believe,’ replied Wiggles ; ‘but I love the country.’

Mr. Dredger was compensated—he expanded, even to the insolent dowager, and forthwith gave Wiggles a pressing invitation to a meet for cub-hunting at Dredger Hall next day, including, with a smile of benign unconsciousness, Lady Lordlie, who, pretending not to hear, addressed some remark to her left-hand neighbour.

‘Our party breaks up to-morrow,’ said Wiggles. ‘I’m afraid it must be “no.”’

‘But you are not going away ?’

‘No, but our guests are.’

‘Then you will come another day?’

‘Lady Calderman is responsible for my engagements,’ she replied.

‘Have you ever ridden to hounds?’ asked Herries.

‘No; but I think I could—the chestnut would carry me splendidly.’

‘Yes; Dart baulks. Felix made me promise never to let you ride him.’

‘Dart is a splendid creature; he only wants a sympathetic rider.’

The conversation became horsey, and the dowager yawned. Mr. Dredger was at home. He knew the pedigree of every horse of note the country round, and was a skilled ‘vet’ from very love of the animal. Smitten as he was by Wiggles, his favourite topic possessed his faculties to the exclusion of all other attractions, and, speaking across her, he soon seemed utterly oblivious of her presence, and intent only on proving the superiority of a certain hunting stock of

his own breeding above that of the Calderman and Cartmel stables. Herries encouraged him quietly, saying little himself. Soon he saw a look of annoyance, if not of disgust, steal over Wiggles' face.

'I think,' he said, in a quiet aside, 'Tennyson had our friend in his eye when he wrote—

". . . like a dog he hunts in dreams."

'Yes,' thought Wiggles, 'the very type,' insensibly repeating to herself,

'Thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise
with clay.'

'Poor Dredger,' whispered Herries. 'Nature and circumstance seldom preserve the unities.'

Wiggles laughed; then, her innate good breeding reproving her, she turned kindly to the unconscious squire, and asked him if he had a large stud.

Herries jerked up his chin hopelessly, but release was at hand. Lady Calderman

gave the signal to a magnificent piece of ornate and gemmed jewellery, lace, and feathers at her lord's right hand ; it rose, majestic, and, lesser lights following, a sigh of relief went round the splendid board, and bottle and conversation relieved from restraint circulated freely. Herries had made his head young, yet the amount of full-bodied claret he absorbed would have tried a seasoned votary of Bacchus. He had, so he imagined, made decided way with the object of his passion, and, drinking deeply to strengthen his nerves and quiet doubts that lingered irritatingly, he resolved to throw the die that very night.

Elmé Campbell, whose keenly observant eyes were ubiquitous, took-in to full understanding the youth's condition. Mrs. Cashel added her observations on Wiggles' inclinations, and between them they agreed that the chances of Lord Calderman's heir were 'nowhere.'

The reception-room to-night was the

grand gallery, which, though with the rest of the public rooms, of the seventeenth century, was furnished according to modern taste and with the utmost luxury. It was upwards of a hundred feet long, and fifty feet broad. Easy lounges, exquisite cabinets, and curious tables were ingeniously grouped at *erratic* intervals, as if to afford opportunities for temporary seclusion, giving the effect of separate though undivided apartments. In one or two cases, richly-coloured screens gave the entire illusion of division. This arrangement imparted a home-like air to the palatial chamber, and seemed to invite confidential coteries and observant cliques. The walls were hung with valuable pictures, principally by French artists, of modern date : Scheffer, De la Roche, and Ingres.

The late lord had been a collector, and his taste had leaned to the French school. An intensely nineteenth-century air hung over the ancient gallery. Lady Calder-

man's taste alone had redeemed it from an upholstery atmosphere. She had a sense of congruity, and, modern art being represented on the walls, she banished the former ornaments, tapestry, *bric-a-brac*, and antique furniture to the more appropriate repositories of saloons and lesser chambers happily left alone by the Philistines.

The gallery was essentially cheerful and bright. Wiggles delighted in it. Her somewhat sad youth reacted on old things, old relics, old memories. She loved life and movement, and turned from all things savouring of the past. Perhaps her ardent spirit recognised insensibly that—to quote a great epigrammatist—‘there are few things more gloomy than a youth that has not been enjoyed.’ So, with the optimist conception she avowed, seeing that ‘it was a time of roses—she plucked them as she passed.’

Mrs. Cashel also delighted in the grand gallery. She had concocted not a few

trivial plots there ; she had given and received not a few peculiar confidences under Scheffer's transcendental Marguerite ascending to the opening heavens from the yawning hell beneath. The place was strangely to her liking and requirements. A gold satin *vis-à-vis*, two easy-chairs to match at no great distance from each other, to make conversation—when the *vis-à-vis* was occupied—pleasant or easy, a low, three-slabbed table, a tiny spider-table, a small chair beside a bookstand full of choice selections of prose and poetry, suggestive of mental luxuriosness and frivolity, and a cabinet devoted to exquisite specimens of Parian statuettes. Each group in the gallery was decked with one dedicatory flower ; the native bloom of this golden section was the rose—exotic forcings of the greenhouse.

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies, Mrs. Cashel was sitting alone in the *vis-à-vis*, apparently deep in a purple and gold book. Elmé Campbell gravitated, as if naturally,

towards her ; as he filled up the vacant seat of the *vis-à-vis*, she laid her book open on her lap.

' You are sooner than usual on the scene,' she said. ' Lord Calderman generally sits late.'

' Heron made good use of his time,' he answered, irrelevantly. ' I should not like to do business with his "charging," I know. He's terribly gone on this "Wiggles." I suppose it will come off ?'

' Never.'

' Why ?'

' She not only doesn't like him, but she's heavy on some one else.' She smiled. ' I am using Lady Trixie's words. Lord Fantum told her some gossip about young Elmore's tutor—Brooks.'

' What ! Sir Burnham Brooks' nephew ?'

' Yes.'

' Ralph Brooks. I know him ; a d—d prig.' As a rule, Mrs. Cashel's intimates were not particular as to a phrase in her company.

'I believe young Elmore has plenty of go.'

'His father had. Queer story altogether.

No one seems certain if Mrs. Elmore is alive.

Does Miss Elmore speak of her as dead?'

'She never speaks of her. What is Mr. Brooks like?'

'A prize-fighter turned Methodist parson.'

'A fine man?'

'As far as inches go.'

'You and he have knocked against each other?'

'Rather.'

'Did you know Mr. Elmore before his wife left him?'

'I used to meet him when I was in the —th. He was a great friend of Horseman's.'

'Oh!' and Mrs. Cashel nodded understandingly. 'You owe him one, then.'

'And mean to clear the score—some day.'

She laughed.

'How small the world is! We can't escape from one another. Are you never afraid of Nemesis?'

'I am afraid of nothing but failure. I am rather curious just now about this Elmore story. Can't you draw Miss "Wiggles," or Lady Calderman?'

'Oh, her ladyship has all the guards up when she talks to me, and—well, I rather like Wiggles; she is so spicy. I know she is not on any kind of friendly terms with her father. I once asked her a simple question about him, and she answered me so gently, yet with such dignity, I felt quite ashamed. She said, "You must pardon me, but I would rather not discuss my family. Everyone knows I am peculiarly situated."'

'Kicking jade!' said Elmé, between his teeth.

'You are a good hater, Elmé. I like spice, but you are vicious.'

'I can be true to those I trust,' he replied.
'And you ought to know that, Pussy.'

She blushed through her rouge; she bit her lip, and plucked a feather from her fan.

'I am tired of plotting, and *qui bono*, with all your schemes, you are a poor man yet. I don't think I bring you good luck. We had better dissolve partnership.'

She looked up at him from under her eyelids, as if half in jest, half in earnest. He did not return her look, but bent forward, picked up a fallen rose, pulled it leaf by leaf to pieces, then, letting the shorn stems drop carelessly into her lap, said, with a jeering laugh,

'That is for Cashel.'

Her eyes flashed fire.

'You can't afford to make me your enemy,' she returned, in a low, fierce undertone.

'Any more than you can afford to be my enemy. Don't be silly, Pussy. I have a big thing on, and you know I am not ungrateful.'

'I knew it. You want me. Who's the pigeon?'

'I'll tell you again; you've shown your claws to-night. I must take care.'

'I can divine—it has to do with Wiggles. Take care, Elmé. Elmore blood is dangerous to stir.'

'Lady Trixie is throwing herself at Heron's head. You are good friends, are you not?'

'Oh, sworn.'

'She owes Miss Wiggles a grudge?'

'I suppose so. Women, like kites, don't like their quarry snatched from them.'

'Claws again, Pussy.' He took her fan and stroked it as he would a doubtful cat. 'See here,'—he fixed his eyes on her, and she, as if she could not help herself, bent to him a listening ear, but with averted face—'Heron went some lengths with her, didn't he? He admired her, and wanted her *dot*?'

'She is a splendid woman, and Heron has a weakness for physique. Yes, he wants money.'

'The Elmore cast-away is well weighted.'

'Out with it, Elmé! What is it you

want me to do? No treachery, I hope; I'm sick of it.'

'All's fair in love or war, you know; don't use ugly words, Pussy; we understand each other, and you can't accuse me of *exigance*. You've had your liberty. However, I'm accommodating, and I promise to dissolve our partnership if this stroke is successful. Lady Trixie is not one to stick at trifles.'

'No, but she *does* draw the line.'

The words were bitter, and Colonel Campbell understood them.

'Claws again,' he said, quietly. 'You overshot your mark, though. I'm not going in for the magnificent Trixie—I'm content with smaller beer; besides, I, too, draw the line—at bigamy.'

Startled, she turned to him with questioning eyes.

'Yes, *chère amie*, Mrs. Campbell has turned up.'

'You said she was dead.'

'So she was—is—to me, as much as you are to Cashel, or, to put it prettier, as Cashel is to you. It is inconvenient at this juncture, as it may hurry matters. However, she is quieted *pro tem.*, and nobody knows. But now to business.' His voice changed, his manner too. Mrs. Cashel shuddered; she knew that trifling was over.
'We all disperse to-morrow.'

'I remain,' she said, faintly.

'Good. For how long?'

'A few days.'

'And then?'

'I go to Treville Mead.'

'The Caldermans' son-in-law's?'

'No, the son-in-law's father's.'

'Don't quibble. You go as the Lady Claire's friend?'

'Yes.'

He took a memorandum-book out of his pocket, and read, 'November 20th, shooting party.' He then read a list of names.

'Am I right?' he asked. 'Any omissions?'

‘Yes, one.’

‘Ralph Brooks?’

‘Yes.’

‘You are returning to your allegiance.
Good.’

‘And young Elmore?’

‘No; he has joined some militia regi-
ment, preparatory to the Army, I believe.’

‘Well posted up. Lady Trixie, of course?’

‘Yes.’ He closed his memorandum-book,
and replaced it in his inner pocket. ‘Now
listen attentively. Some one’s going to sing.
We’re safe for some minutes. Be con-
fidential with Lady Trixie. Work up the
Brooks’ inclination; put her up to mischief.
She’s primed; *you* need do nothing. Cul-
tivate Brooks. That will be difficult. “Birds
of a feather,” you know. Still you can
drop hints, and hints are useful weapons.
I wish him to become suspicious—you un-
derstand. Outlines are sufficient for you.
Do you hear, Pussy?’ He bent forward,
and whispered, ‘Herries must be the man,

and Brooks must be kept out of the way.'

'A diabolic game!' she said.

'I don't object to your calling a spade a spade, but his Satanic Majesty is a useful ally sometimes, and, I must say, he has been a faithful one to me.'

'I see the whole thing,' she returned, suddenly, shutting up her fan, and holding it tightly with both hands, as she looked her companion full in the face. 'I shall have to lie, and trick, and scheme, and perhaps forge. I cannot, Elmé. I tell you I like the girl, and Herries Heron is a heartless libertine.'

'You are so literal!' he said. 'You do use such unnecessarily demonstrative terms. *You* need not tar those pretty fingers.' He took her fan by gentle force from her, and tapped her hand with it a little sharply. 'If anything so very risky should be necessary, you will not find the Lady Trixie squeamish. All I want you to do is to pull the wires. You are far too clever to impli-

cate yourself. If ever I saw passion in woman's eyes, I saw it in Lady Trixie's this night—passion and hate. I almost pitied her. If looks could kill, Miss Wiggles would not be telling us in such harmonious numbers that she is "comin' thro' the rye." Prophetic damsel !

Mrs. Cashel turned her head quickly. Wiggles stood beside a tiny piano, Lady Calderman playing the accompaniment, singing with a happy *abandon*, a merry ring in her sweet, thrilling voice, the sweet old Scotch song Elmé had named. She listened. Her sharp, clever face wore an unusual look of sympathy, of even feeling.

The song was ended.

'Elmé, I cannot,' she said.

'Be practical, Pussy.' He spoke as if to a petted child. 'You owe Madame Dolma five hundred pounds. Her patience is not proverbial, and she is getting suspicious—so you told me—about Cashel's remittances. Mr. Samuels, too—five hundred there, is it

not? Now, don't be a little fool, help me in this matter, and I promise you a clear thousand. Is it a bargain—honour among thieves, you know—we can trust each other. You have been leal to me, Pussy. You are the only woman I ever really loved. You know that; for I have trusted you utterly—it is you who are growing tired of me, not I of you.'

He spoke in simulation of deep feeling, slowly, and in jerks, his hand on her arm, his eyes fixed on her downcast face. Her lip quivered.

False, shallow, cold, and heartless as her life had been, as her heart was now, Kathleen Cashel had loved this man, had sinned for him. She was a bold and a clever *intriguante*, but intrigue had grown irksome to her of late, for it had not paid, and Kathleen was practical. She was getting a little impatient, a little afraid of her position in society. The fictions she had circulated about her husband were somewhat threadbare now, and people were beginning to

ask of those who were supposed to know, Mr. Cashel's side of the story. She saw, too, that Colonel Campbell was not a universally favoured guest, and she resolved to turn to fresh fields and pastures new ; to cultivate the society of women of character and understanding, and to cut compromising friends.

But this was easier resolved than accomplished; the spell of Elmé Campbell was on her still, the spell of a dominant will and memory of what she desecrated by the name of love. His creature she had been, his creature she was still. The weak aspirations after a better, or at least a less compromising life, the weak admiration for virtues foreign to her own nature, the weak liking for the fresh, true, ardent Margaret Elmore, the weak regret for evil wrought, the weak wish to rehabilitate a somewhat threadbare reputation—all vanished, as vanish the idle waking dreams of the sybarite, or the vapid resolutions of the sentimentalist, at the sound of her lover's pleading

voice, at the touch of her master's firm grasp. She was Elmé Campbell's slave, and, though she knew it not, a willing slave. She shut her eyes to the certainty of approaching retribution ; she knew her day would be short, that to society there was but one deadly sin—to be found out, and from that for her there was no escape.

' You may depend on me, Elmé,' she said, quietly, ' and if, in my hour of need, you fail me—'

' You will—what ?—let me know the worst ;' he grasped her arm *more firmly*, a not pleasant smile showing his white teeth.

She turned her flashing eyes to his—his were soft and loving ; again her mood changed. He played her well. He knew her well. Hers, too, grew soft ; she smiled.

' Well,' she said, ' I'd never "*lay me down and dee.*" I—I'd die *game*. Now, you know the worst.'

' I think I'll brave it.'

Again their eyes met, and Kathleen Cashel was content.

CHAPTER X.

‘A very excellent piece of villainy.’

It had been a long day of careless enjoyment, and Wiggles had thrown herself into the pleasure of the hour. The country neighbours had been a source of amusement to her, and the impassibility of the great folks staying at the castle had been so likewise. The scene was novel to her, she had entered into it with freshness and spirit. She had laughed and talked, had sung her clearest and sweetest, had charmed the most *blasé*, and thawed the most frigid ; but the hour was waning now, and reaction, setting in, her heart began to yearn for quiet, and a waking dream of her mother, perhaps

too of some one else. Her song ended, she managed to glide away unnoticed to the very end of the gallery, and to throw herself into a deep lounge beside a long mirror. Her head fell back on the soft cushion, and under it she passed her hands, clasped together by interlaced fingers. She closed her eyes, and so lay ‘a-thynkyng.’ A soft shaded lamp stood on a table near, and beside the billowy lounge she occupied was a tall *prie-dieu* chair. She had not enjoyed her retirement long when she was recalled to outer life by the strange sense of the presence of another person, a sense imparted not by sound, but by some occult influence.

She opened her eyes suddenly, they fell level on Herries’. He was sitting on the *prie-dieu*, gazing intently on her. His face was flushed, and his eyes had a bold, yet uncertain look. She did not know why, but she felt her heart sink as if at some unseen peril.

'I was so tired,' she said, rising to her feet, 'it is late, is it not?'

He took her hand, and pressed her back into her seat.

'Don't you hear Lady Trixie in the agonies of "Carmen"?' he said, with a laugh.

Wiggles had never seen anyone the worse for wine, not even flushed from its over-indulgence ; she knew there was something wrong, and felt just a bit frightened. Some one had offended Herries, that is what she thought—he had not a good temper, she knew that ; she would be patient, and soothe him ; he had been very kind to her, and she owed Lady Calderman every consideration, so she would show as much as she could to her son. She sat down.

'Something has put you out, Mr. Heron,' she said. 'I am afraid you are not the philosopher you would have me believe ; no one is, I fancy, in their own affairs.'

He swung his chair round so as to face her.

‘I have something to tell you,’ he whispered, as though the furniture had ears. As he spoke, he looked inadvertently into the mirror ; the reflection of his flushed face for the moment startled him. He was quite enough himself to know that he was not quite himself, and to feel annoyed that his head was not so clear as it might have been ; but his voice was steady, and so was his purpose. He knew what he was about to do ; on that he was clear enough. He started back.

‘This lamp is flaring,’ he said, and he lowered the wick, slightly changing his position, so as to throw his face a little into shade.

‘Is it a secret?’ asked Wiggles, lightly, as if to lead to neutral ground.

‘Not from you.’

‘Then, why tell me?’

‘Guess.’

A sudden daring spirit of mischief possessed her.

'It is about Lady Trixie. Am I to congratulate you ?'

He took her hand before she could defend herself so tightly that, without attracting attention, she could not release herself.

'Lady Trixie,' he cried, with an oath that took the colour for a second from her cheeks. She put up her free hand in protest.

'Let me go, Mr. Heron,' she cried ; 'you forget yourself.'

He did not heed her ; with a sudden action he made her other hand prisoner, bent forward, and, in a few fierce words, told her his passion.

She was pale now as the exotic lilies in perfumed profusion around her ; the next moment the blood rushed back to her very brow.

'How dare you ?' she said, in a smothered voice, looking hastily round. He knew his advantage ; she would escape observation.

'Hush ! no one is looking—no one can hear. Give me my answer.'

‘Let me go.’

The words were spoken with recovered self-possession, but the fire in her indignant eyes burnt fiercely. He was blinded by the passion that consumed him even more than by the wine he had drunk.

‘Not till you say “Yes.”’

‘Mr. Heron, I am your mother’s guest. You are not yourself; you did not mean what you said.’

‘By —— I did—I do. Maggie, bend your lips down to mine, and give me your answer. Here at your feet,’—he threw himself on his knees before her, still grasping her hands—‘here I give up to you for ever, and for ever, all I am, all I have, all my past, all my future. You shall do with me as you will, make me what you will. Look at me, Maggie; why do you shut your eyes as if in pain? Do you not love my mother? can you not love her son? Oh! you can make my mother happy; for, if you will give yourself to me, you will make

me all her poor, wounded heart could wish. Darling, you shall never, never hear a rough word from my lips; I will have no will but yours. Even if you do not love me as I would have you love me, as I will make you love me, only tell me you will try. You dare not say me nay, Maggie; you dare not throw me back into the reckless life I would leave for your sake. Would you have a ruined home, a blasted name, a soul steeped in vice at your door? for I swear,—and, with fierce emphasis, he swore an impious oath—‘that, if you shut your heart to my pleading, I will stake my inheritance on the dice, I will cover the name of Calderman with infamy, and bring down my mother’s head with anguish to the grave. Will you dare all this, Margaret Elmore? What is the mawkish love of a Ralph Brooks, old and worn, to mine? Oh! have pity, Maggie, have pity! Listen to me; believe in me, for very pity’s sake. I never knew love before. Oh, had I known the agony,

the pain, I would have fled your presence as they fled the plague of old.'

She could not help it; she pitied him. That he suffered, she knew, intense commiseration made her suffer too. He was strung up almost to madness; she felt that he needed a gentle hand. But she would not temporise; she thought of Ralph Brooks, his grave manliness, his deep, calm love, his trust in her, and she was strong.

'Only let go my hands,' she said, quietly, 'and I will answer you. The music has ceased. Lady Calderman has risen—we shall be missed.'

He released her; but knelt still, clutching her gown as if he were about to fall. She leant forward, her hands raised with warning action, and said,

'You have been so good to me; my stay here, short as it is, has been so pleasant; and I love your mother dearly. Oh! Mr. Heron, be generous; forget what you have said, and I will forget it too. I

do not love you. I never can love you. And, oh ! it seems so cruel to say it, but I am only cruel to be kind ; I would rather *die* than marry you. But we can be very dear friends—for Felix's sake—for your mother's sake.'

He heard each word—but these, 'I would rather die than marry you,' struck home to his heart. The iron had entered into his soul. Poor Maggie, she had been what she meant to be, explicit—not a shadow of hope had her answer left. And Herries Heron knew it. The knowledge sobered him. Without a word, he rose, turned up the lamp to a brighter flame, cast a hasty look round, and then, stepping back a pace or two, said,

' You would rather die than marry me!—not a pleasant alternative—not a flattering announcement. I am, as years go, a very young man, Margaret Elmore. I am old in the ways of women,'—he came closer to her as she sat statue-still and pale, and, with an

oath even more impious than the one he had used in his passion, he added, 'I swear that you shall not die, but live to be my wife. But, listen, I do not promise to be the model husband I would have had you make me. I must have compensation for an unwilling bride.'

He turned on his heel. Her spirit was roused, not her fear.

'I defy you, Herries Heron,' she said. 'You are a bad man. I shall speak to Lady Calderman, and leave your roof.'

'You need not,' he paused to say. 'I shall relieve you of my presence in the morning. It might be well to consider my mother's feelings;' and with these words he hurried away through a side-door in the gallery, so avoiding observation.

The door closed noiselessly after him—the next moment it was as noiselessly opened, and Colonel Campbell followed in his steps.

Herries rushed rather than hurried to the

billiard-room, stopping a moment in a small ante-room, where some brandy and soda-water stood on a side-table, to drink a deep draught of very slightly diluted spirit. His eyes were bloodshot—his face was not pleasant to look on. The light was subdued; he threw himself upon the divan which circled the room, and crossed his arms, closing his eyes. Some one came quietly in, and sat down beside him. He turned with a start. It was Elmé Campbell.

Herries was in no mood for company, still less for that of Colonel Campbell. He owed him money, and Elmé was, besides, cognisant of some heavy engagements of his, the settling day for which seemed in the far offing. He did not thoroughly like the man, much as they had in common. Herries had a keen scent for a *parvenu*. He was proud as Lucifer on all social matters, and material states, though in the abstract concerns of moral and chivalric obligations his sense of *noblesse oblige* was by no means

lively. Perhaps, like many others, he believed that the prestige of a name covered a multitude of derelictions.

'Hang it, Campbell,' he said, surlily, 'how you steal on a fellow!'

Elmé knew the iron was red-hot; he struck at once. He said without preamble—without even a word of warning, but in a tone of the deepest significance,

'You are hard hit, Heron. I have something to "sell."'

Herries turned his flushed face to him, almost savagely.

'What the — is that to you? Keep on the border, and — you.'

'You are drunk, man, or you wouldn't quarrel with your bread and cheese; you've made an ass of yourself with that girl, and she has bowled you over—stop; when I've had my say, you may do the same to me, if you like—she's bowled you over and laughed at you. She's sweet on Brooks, and Brooks is gone past redemption on her.'

They're both rather remarkable persons in their way, and have more than common wills of their own. I believe in occult force, and, unless a miracle happens, they're sure to come together ; they believe in each other ; she's romantic, and he—him, he's chivalric ; he'd never believe the directest evidence against her. She's his divinity. Oh, wondrous, ever recurring, ever irresistible delusion—love ! Oh, marvellous, pestilential disorder, curable in youth, deadly in middle age !

'It's you who are drunk,' said Herries, throwing his head back again and closing his eyes. 'Mind your own business and be — to you !'

'This is my business, peculiarly so, my poor boy ; you have it badly, thought you had been inoculated. You've had a check ; but never mind, the disease will run its course and *cure itself*. She won't have you, she says she would rather die than marry you. Now, be patient, I've nearly done.'

Yes, I was in at the drop-scene ; little spit-fire ! I would not have let her off so easily. Listen, Heron : I've something to *sell*, and you know when Elmé Campbell says that there's business to be done. It's about this Elmore filly. But first let me re-assure you about myself, you are naturally suspicious. I am not doing the philanthropic ; candidly, I don't care a toss whether you break your heart about the girl or not, my motive is purely personal, it is hate of Ralph Brooks, Felix Elmore, senior, Horseman, and John Frankland. People make themselves very busy sometimes as to who I am. Miss Wiggles gave me a nasty little prick of her sharp tongue on that score ; but what I am is really all that concerns society. The day is past for lineage credentials ; if it were not so, we'd be pretty near the "last man" in that cosmo by this. I must be a little confidential, so you must wake up.'

Herries did wake up ; he was becoming strangely interested.

'I am a colonel of volunteers and a C.B.,

which with the uninitiated carries a good deal, and the uninitiated are really those to be considered, they are the ephemera of society, its potentiality. A C.B. is all possible, its quantity is unknown. Mine was for secret service; it was accompanied by a yearly trifle, which does not appear in the estimates. Twenty years ago I was venturesome, I was not rich; I had been promised a commission, but I was in debt. I was always lucky at cards. One night at the Royal Blue Club—I was Frankland's guest,—I was too lucky. There were four round the table besides myself, Frankland, Elmore, Brooks, and Horseman. Loo was the game. I own to carelessness—rashness. I turned king ace for the fourth time; as I did so, Brooks deliberately, unnoticed by me only, struck a match, heated some sealing wax, and, suddenly holding it over my hand, let a great blotch fall on the back; I jumped up, and two cards, an ace and a king, fell from my sleeve. We adjourned to a private room; they made themselves into a jury

and found me guilty; but in consideration of my youth, my talents—so they were pleased to say—and my orphan condition, they agreed to hush it up on the stipulation that I refused Her Majesty's commission, absented myself from England for a given time, and entered into a sworn and signed agreement not to return to my native country, or to show my face in society again, without credentials from a trustworthy source that I had conducted myself *sans peur et sans reproche*. I had to consent, there was no appeal, they would listen to no explanation. They made up a sum, and I went to Austria. I returned some few years ago with the requisite credentials, and Her Gracious Majesty's recognition of certain services embodied in the mystical letters *C.B.* They made me a colonel of valiant volunteers, and, *au reste*, I have lived by my wits. But I am not of a forgiving nature, and I have bided my time, hoping against hope; but the world and all that is in it comes to him that waits; my hour has come. I have the quartette in the

hollow of my hand. You love this girl ; she is yours if you think her worth the powder and shot.'

Herries was wide awake and clear-headed now. He knew that Elmé Campbell never uttered idle boasts. Disliking the man, he yet believed in him. The very confession he had made was a warrant of his good faith. The story of Elmé's unlucky marriage, the disappearance of his wife, the whispers of Frankland's complicity, and the mystery of Wiggles' bringing-up, General Horseman's known life-long friendship for Elmore, and Brooks' devotion to Felix. All, in swift and spectral portent, flitted through his brain. Elmé Campbell, the cutest tout out, the quietest, most mysterious, dangerous, best posted-up man in every scandal, every secret family history, had 'struck ile' in the Elmore affair. He was worth his figure. Quick as lightning, Herries dropped to the offer.

'Name your figure,' he said.

'Five thousand.'

Herries paused, only a second. ‘The Hurstpoint property,’ he thought.

‘Done,’ he said.

The pair drew closer, their memorandum-books open. Little was said for the space of some minutes; then Elmé Campbell read a document by which he bound himself, on a penalty of one thousand pounds in the event of failure, to make Margaret Elmore Herries Heron’s willing bride before the end of the year. Herries, on his part, covenanted to pay over, on the day of such marriage, the sum of five thousand pounds to Elmé Campbell, ‘for secret service,’ said the latter; ‘it pays.’

The papers signed, they were torn from the books, and exchanged. The two then repaired to Elmé’s room, where they were safer from intrusion. They did not separate till the small hours.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

